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Nigel Short I was wrong about Botvinnik

Ding Liren wins Moscow GP

Wesley So US Champion

Sleep better Play better!

Judit Polgar The captain and me

Shakhriyar Mamedyarov leads Grand Prix and hits 2800

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HIKARU NAKAMURA HAT-TRICK IN ZURICH

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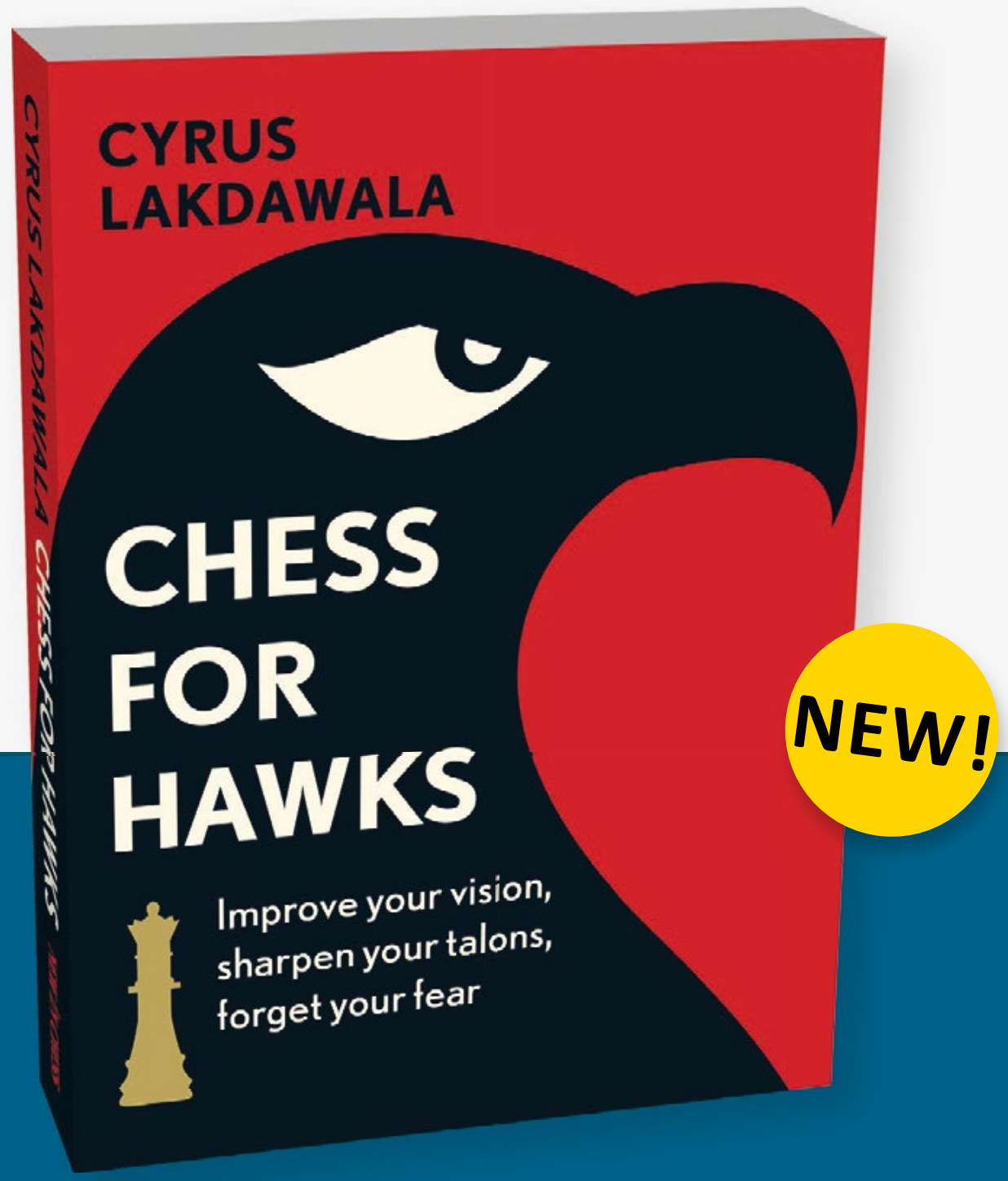

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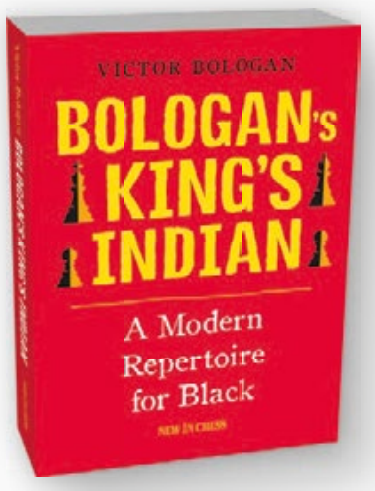

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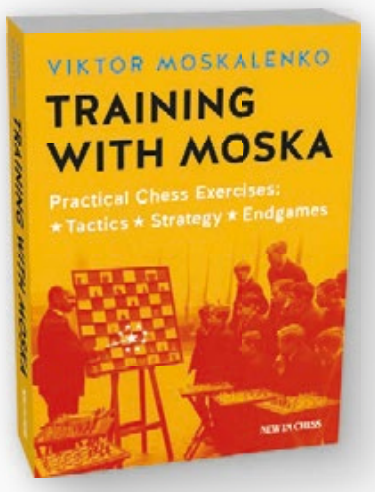

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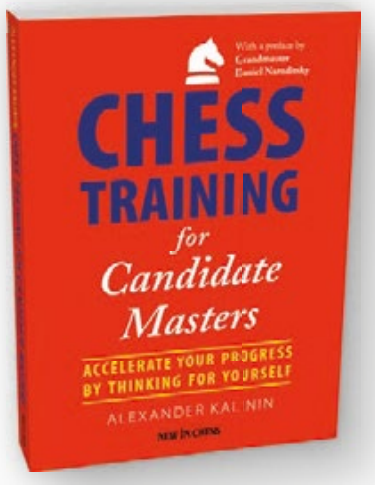

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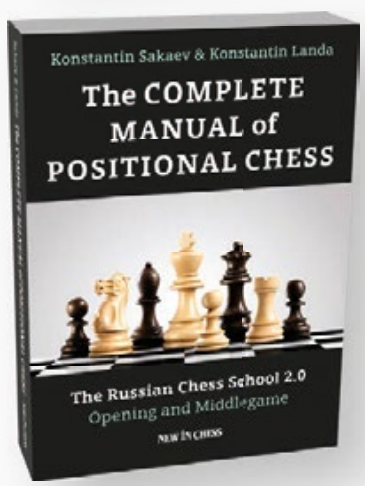
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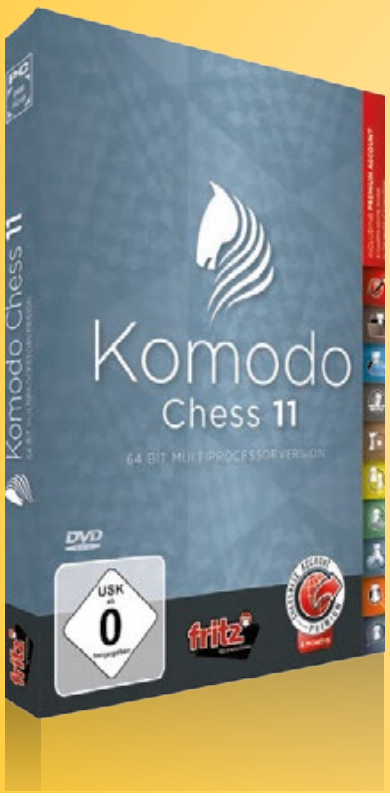

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GM Boris Avrukh

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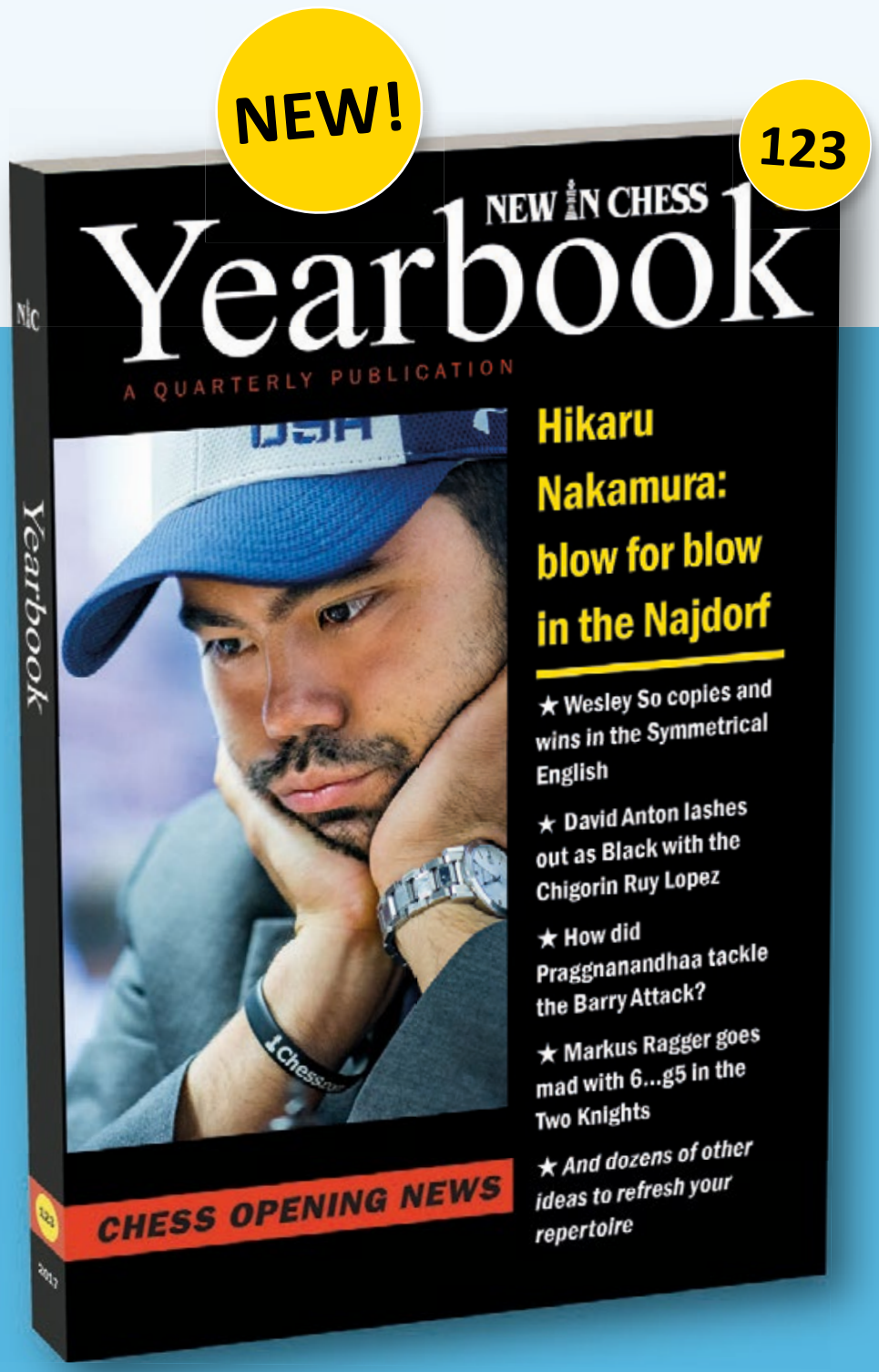
British Chess Magazine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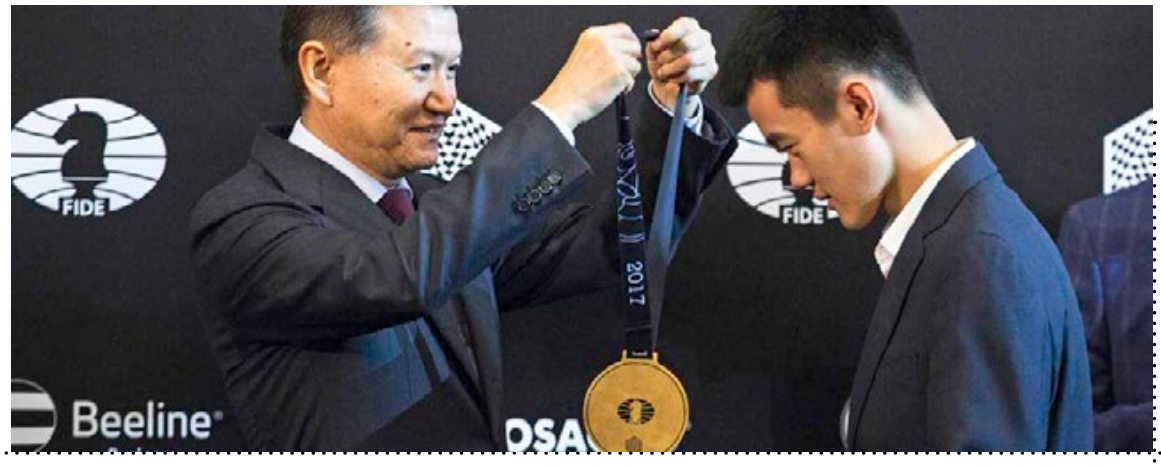

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CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE
Erwin l'Ami, Vishy Anand, Levon Aronian, Jeroen Bosch, Anish Giri, Nils Grandelius, John Henderson, Mihail Marin, Dylan McClain, Hikaru Nakamura, Ian Nepomniachtchi, Maxim Notkin, Arthur van de Oudeweetering, Judit Polgar, Hans Ree, Eric van Reem, Matthew Sadler, Nigel Short, Wesley So, Jan Timman, Jennifer Vallens, Hou Yifan

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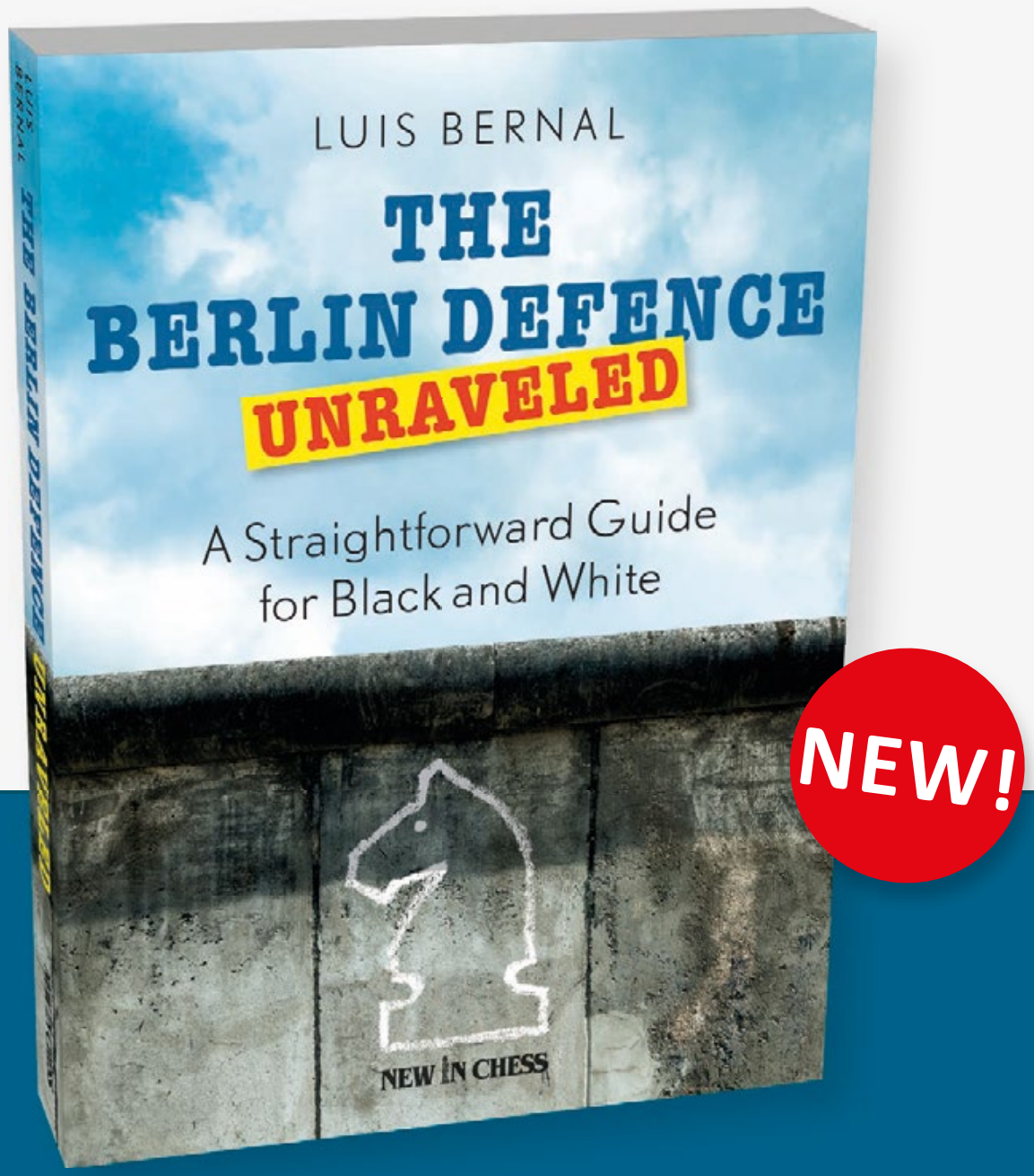
Finally: the Berlin for club players



Club players often hesitate to include 'the Berlin' in their repertoire because they see the typical Berlin Wall endgame as complex and daunting. But today, the Berlin is much more than just the Wall!

IM Luis Bernal's fully up-to-date and practical guide explains typical formations and strategies, and presents new ideas and resources in the old Berlin Wall structures. But he also leads you through the labyrinth of all modern Anti-Berlins and presents a number of tricky sidelines that could catch your opponent off guard.

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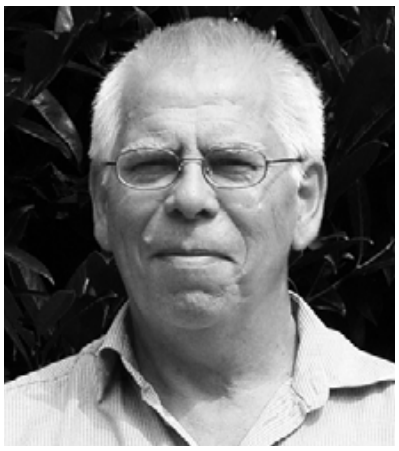
Founding Father

On May 14, Wim Andriessen, the founder of New In Chess, died at the age of 78. Wim had been in frail health for the past months and there was a sense of relief that he was spared further suffering, but our first feeling is that of a painful void now that a man who had played such a prominent role in our lives is no longer among us.

Wim embarked on his publishing career in 1968 with the Dutch magazine *Schaakbulletin*. In the years that followed, the magazine's reputation took on legendary proportions with contributors like Hein Donner, Jan Timman, Genna Sosonko, Hans Ree and Tim Krabbé. Wim's mission was ambitious, but he succeeded. He wanted to present professional journalism and, in line with this wish, he wanted to be independent, in contrast to the periodical published by the Dutch chess federation.

'Now that it was in English, he wanted all the best players in the world to write for the magazine.'

By the time I subscribed to *Schaakbulletin* – not having the faintest idea that one day I would be working for Wim – an increasing number of articles and annotated games were being written by foreign celebrities. There were also signs that more and more readers from across the border were trying to get a rudimentary grasp of the Dutch language in order not to miss out on this chess jewel. The next logical step was New In Chess, which Wim started in 1984. Now that it was in English, he wanted all the best players in the world to write for the magazine.



Wim Andriessen (1938-2017)

Wim continued to publish New In Chess, the Yearbook and many other publications till 2004. A hard worker, tirelessly thinking up new initiatives, and a family man who adored his wife Annelies, and was proud of his children. And a strong-minded person, not always easy to deal with, as quite a few recipients of his letters and emails found out.

More than 30 years after Wim founded New In Chess, our mission has essentially remained the same. We still want to bring you top-notch chess entertainment and the best instruction, so you can both enjoy the best play and improve your own.

And we continue to cherish independent journalism in a time when many magazines have disappeared or seen their budgets cut, and chess news sites often have to think of their own commercial interests first. We remain a platform open to all views.

Thanks a lot, Wim.

Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam
Editor-in-Chief

The Diplomatic Chess Board

It's often perceived in the media that Vladimir Putin is like a grandmaster as he makes his moves on the diplomatic chess board. The image is obviously based on the somewhat clichéd view that these strategic chess skills are part of the DNA of every Russian.

Andy Davey, one of the UK's leading political cartoonists (www.andydavey.com), has now wielded his mighty pen for a series of Putin cartoons that highlight the Russian leader's involvement in state-sponsored hacking, and collusion to undermine our democracy, values and (national) influence.

This chess cartoon was the scene-setter for the series, and naturally it played up to this 'grandmaster' perception, with Putin being the ultimate strategist on the political board.

The aim of the cartoon campaign is to address Putin's manoeuvring; to hold those guilty to account; for new rules to beat them; and avoid a hard Brexit that would weaken the West further.

On seeing the cartoon, one equally vocal Putin critic, Garry Kasparov, was quick off the mark on Twitter to comment on the chess skills of the Russian leader: 'Funny, but it's an entirely wrong interpretation. The free world has a superior position and more material, but plays like an idiot.' ■

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THE WEST

NIC's Café

FU Magnus

Frank 'FU' Underwood is back! But can House of Cards's latest fictional Oval Office megalomaniac still hold our attention, when there's a real-life White House luridly lurching from crisis to crisis? Time will tell, but as one

HoC GM Frank Underwood.

critic claimed, the upcoming season five of Netflix's flagship drama could well look a model of tranquillity and stability compared to the real thing.

And with wonderful timing for the new season of HoC, World Champion Magnus Carlsen found himself facing President Frank Underwood (OK, Hollywood A-lister Kevin Spacey in reality) across a chessboard recently during a charity event at Russian venture capitalist billionaire Yuri Milner's house in Los Angeles, while he was attending the Milken Institute Global Conference.

Spacey's scheming character in the Emmy Award-winning drama is perceived to be the ultimate political chess master, as he plans his moves ten steps ahead of everyone else and will stop at nothing until he's won. And readers who follow the cult show will be aware that several earlier episodes have also portrayed FU playing himself at chess, as he menacingly delivers straight to camera some of his unique brand of 'truth bombs', some even with a chessic twist, such as 'Congress is a game of chess, and you must never let your opponent see your pieces' and not forgetting the classic 'Sex is like chess: It's fun online.'

Almost Famous

One of the sublime pleasures in starting a band is the hallowed ritual of conceiving its name. Probably, many musicians would grudgingly admit to having spent more time imagining the perfect band name than mastering their instrument.

We certainly liked what a new American band from the Colorado area came up with, a Fort Collins-based trio, consisting of singer/guitarist Caleb McFadden, bassist Justin Daggett and drummer Mike Davis. Their name? Chess at Breakfast!

A couple of years ago, the fledgling band members were still figuring out just what to call themselves, but found their inspiration during what became a very competitive game of chess played with condiments over breakfast. Chess at Breakfast are said by one influential Denver rock scribe to be like '... the gritty sounds of experimental rock bands like Queens of the Stone Age, Pink Floyd and Arctic Monkeys, finding a unique niche within an eclectic set of influences.'

Chess for Breakfast, music for dessert.

Grandmaster Blasters

Could there be a more mouth-watering line-up of extraordinarily talented cricketers – and all dubbed in their sport as 'Master Blasters' – playing chess? We don't think so, and when the iconic old photo below surfaced for the first time recently, we like to think it had those two well-known GM cricketing buffs, Peter Svidler and Nigel Short, drooling over it.

The photo shows West Indian cricketing colossus Sir Viv Richards, arguably the world's greatest batsman during his playing days in the 1970s and 80s, taking on India's Sachin Tendulkar, who replaced him as the world's leading batsman. And just

Sir Viv Richards takes on Sachin Tendulkar, Virender Sehwag and Yuvraj Singh.

for good measure, there's also the future with a young Virender Sehwag, who went on to become India's free-scoring opening batsman (and who posted this previously unseen image on Twitter), alongside emerging cricketing prodigy Yuvraj Singh – and unusually, all captured in a light-hearted moment over a game of chess!

The Art of Chess

We all know that there's a long history of chess in art, and the latest artist to be treading in the footsteps of the likes of Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray is Darren Bader. The New York-based artist has a new installation in his hometown – so if you saw a group of people recently sitting on stools on concrete tiles on the High Line in Manhattan, then they were playing a game that in some way resembled chess.

The commission, titled *chess: relatives*, which runs May 2017 through April 2018, consists of a large-scale chessboard specially designed by the artist – uniform grey ceramic squares, each inscribed with 'lighter' and 'darker' in the artist's own hand – and located on the High Line at 13th Street. But rather than using

traditional chess pieces, visitors are encouraged to assemble 'teams', using their own friends and family. The willing participants are then arranged on the board based on their relationships to one another.

Rather than trying to spin any flowery words around this, let's allow High Line Art to be direct: 'As one of the most interactive artworks exhibited, the intention of *chess: relatives* is to spark new connections, conversations, and debate amongst visitors. The piece also gives visitors the chance to become a part of an artwork that aims to ask more questions about art than it can answer.'

Chess and art on the New York High Line.

It takes a chess set

Listening out for the words, 'This is the BBC World Service from London', is invariably followed by a radio broadcast that will entertain and enlighten. A recent broadcast, that has also become a major feature online at BBC Travel, tells about a village in India that was saved by the game of chess.

Fifty years ago, Marottichal, a small village in the foothills of Northern Kerala, was so rife with alcoholism and illicit gambling that it proved to be unruly and unpopular. But everything changed after one simple man opened a teashop in a former bar in order to teach the town to play chess; his mission being to move it away from its bad reputation. And lo and behold, the game became so popular in the village that they forgot all about drinking and gambling.

In the village of Marottichal, chess proved more addictive than alcohol.

The village was visited by freelance travel journalist Jack Palfrey. 'Unnikrishnan, the teashop's owner, is a very simple man with dark eyes and callous hands but with an intimidating mind and grin smile,' observed Palfrey. 'He made an impossible job possible, changed the villagers' dark habit and made them strategic in real life.'

The village now has its own chess association, and its president, Baby John, describes how, while most Indian village chess associations number less than 50, Marottichal has between 4,000 of its 6,000 population playing chess, almost daily. 'Luckily for us chess is more addictive than alcohol.'

The Nobel Ljubo

Serbian-born Grandmaster Ljubomir 'Ljubo' Ljubojevic has to be one of the chess world's most colourful and indefatigable characters. And he keeps surprising us as he took on a new task during the Gashimov Memorial. We've seen many Nobel Peace prizes awarded over the years for getting warring parties in the Middle East and Northern Ireland to finally shake hands, but in Shamkir, in his role as online commentator, we saw Ljubo making his own case for a Nobel Peace-prize nomination by attempting to get bitter rivals Vladimir Kramnik and Veselin Topalov to finally end their long-time feud.

Of course, there's always drama and tension when these two rivals meet. And as usual, there was no handshake at the board. But when they came to the post-mortem, after 10 minutes of analysis-only dialogue between the two, Ljubo seized his chance. He started by asking what appeared at first to be some innocuous questions to each player, such as whether they used homeopathic or traditional medicine, and, playing along, both players gave answers.

But then Ljubo moved on with a novel approach of a possible scenario for a reconciliation – and he did it by adopting a Shakespearian *Romeo & Juliet* approach! 'Now then, you have a young son,' Ljubo said to Kramnik, and then turning to Topalov, said 'and you have a young daughter... Now, what if the two meet while you are playing in a future chess tournament, and fall in love. Would you allow them to marry?'

Looking a little perplexed at first, both players began to see the funny side to this, and with wry smiles on their faces, indicated there would be no reconciliation but they wouldn't stand in the way of true love for their children. Indeed, Ljubo's trick seemed to offer hopes of a possible détente between the two, as on the final evening of the Shamkir tournament they were seen at one table, both in a good mood, sharing food and drinks. ■

Peace broker 'Ljubo' Ljubojevic in between Kramnik and Topalov.

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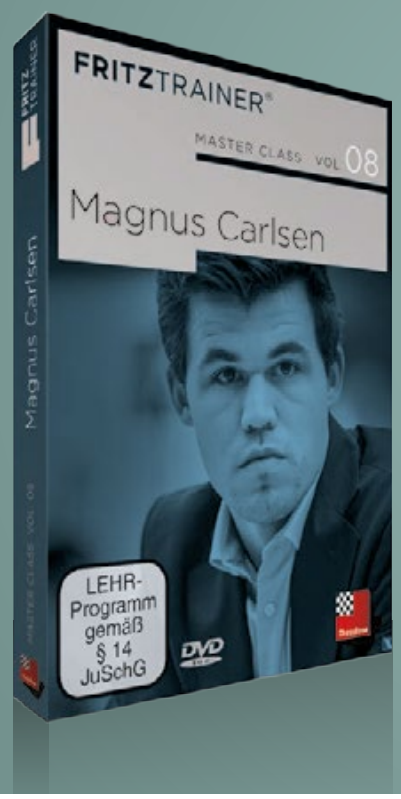

MASTER CLASS VOL.08

MAGNUS CARLSEN

Out now! The Master Class DVD about the greatest chess genius of our time is now available. Let the experts Mihail Marin, Dr. Karsten Müller, Niclas Huschenbeth and Oliver Reeh reveal the secrets of Magnus Carlsen's success. A must for every chess lover!

Scarcely any world champion has managed to captivate both chess lovers and the general public to the extent Magnus Carlsen has. The enormously talented Norwegian arrived on the scene as if from nowhere, without having been systematically trained within the structures of a major chess-playing nation such as Russia, the Ukraine or more recently, China. Rather, his development had taken place in an almost totally private setting. Upon recognizing his son's unbelievable talent, his father took him out of school, bought a camper van and, together with the whole family, set about traveling from tournament to tournament. The rough diamond from Norway was gradually polished in countless tournament games, and was soon receiving invitations to top tournaments, where he proved his incredibly deep understanding of chess against even the world's top players.

Thanks to Carlsen's style, computersupported opening preparation has faded somewhat into the background, with a greater importance being placed on the sporting side of chess – deep strategy, extensive endgame knowledge, energy and endurance are the trump cards of the new chess megastar. By 2010, Carlsen was already number one in the world ranking list; in 2013 he also claimed the title of World Champion, a title he has now successfully defended twice.

On this DVD, experts including Mihail Marin, Karsten Müller, Oliver Reeh and Niclas Huschenbeth examine the games of the 16th World Champion. Let them show you how Carlsen tailored his openings to be able to outplay his opponents strategically in the middlegame or to obtain an enduring advantage into the endgame, and bear witness to how the Norwegian always managed to find a way to pose his opponents serious problems, even in apparently level endings.

- Video running time: 7 hours 39 min. (English)
- Interactive tactics test with video feedback
- Featuring a database of all Carlsen's games, tournament crosstables, and a short biography
- "Carlsen Powerbooks": 16th World Champion's opening repertoire as a variation tree
- Tactical training with 103 games: 218 training questions, a maximum of 525 points

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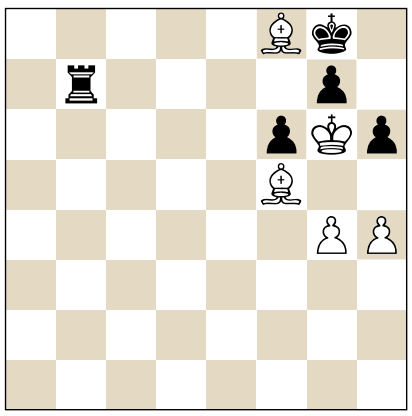
How chess imitates art

The second tiebreaker of the World Championship match in New York almost ended up in an endgame study.



Carlsen-Karjakin
New York 2016 (tiebreak-2)
position after 74...♔g8

The game ended in a draw (by stalemate!) after 75.♗a3? ♔h8 76.♗e6 ♖b6 77.♔f7 ♖b7+ 78.♗e7 h5 79.gxh5 f5 80.♗xf5 ♖xe7+ 81.♔xe7 ♔g8 82.♗d3 ♔h8 83.♔f8 g5 84.hxg6 stalemate.
But White could have won by **75.♗c5! ♔h8 76.♗e6** threatening 77.♗f8 and 78.♗f7. Black's only defence is **76...♖b8 77.h5!** and we are in a genuine, not-so-obvious, position of reciprocal zugzwang! The point is that the white king threatens to play to f7 if the black rook cannot check on the 7th rank, e.g. 77...♖d8 78.♔f7 ♖b8 79.♗f8 ♖b5 80.♗xg7+ ♔h7 81.♔xf6 ♖b6 82.♗f8 and although it is not easy yet, White wins (by putting the bishop on the c1-h6 diagonal and advancing the g-pawn). **77...♖a8!** White now needs a stunning move: **78.g5!!** As 78...fxg5 fails to 79.♗d4, winning, Black plays: **78...hxg5 79.h6!! gxh6 80.♗e7 ♖g8+ 81.♔h6** and ins. I would have been proud if this were one of my endgame studies!

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New In Chess, P.O. Box 1093
1810 KB Alkmaar, The Netherlands
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An endgame study tourney is organized to celebrate the 65th birthday of Jan Timman. The tourney has an open (thematic) tourney and a section for FIDE o.t.b. title holders. I invite GM Carlsen and GM Karjakin, as well as other title holders, to compete by submitting an endgame study before August 1, 2017 (see the Tournament Calendar at www.arves.org).

Harold van der Heijden
Deventer, The Netherlands

The oldest chess club

At the recent World Senior Team Championship in Crete I represented one of the oldest chess clubs in the Netherlands, Discendo Discimus, founded in 1852 in The Hague. A friendly Swede told me he was a member of the Stockholm Chess Society, the third oldest club in the world, that last year celebrated its 150th anniversary. Unfortunately I forgot to ask him which two clubs were older than his… Did he think my club was one of the two older clubs? I don't think so.

In 1986 I tried to find out which were the oldest chess clubs in the Netherlands, now I felt inspired to find out which were the oldest clubs in the world. My criterion is that a club must have existed without interruption and that it is not the result of a merger. Which means, for instance, that the Berliner Schachgesellschaft, founded in 1827, but merged with Eckbauer after World War II, is not included.

As one of the oldest clubs in the United States I seemed to remember the Manhattan Chess Club, where Capablanca and Fischer used to play. But the Manhattan Chess Club closed its doors years ago and as far as I could find now, the Mechanics Institute in San Francisco (1854) is America's most venerable chess society.

Together with my teammate Ronald Dickhoff, I drew up the list below. As you can see, the Stockholm Chess Society reaches no higher than 21st.

No doubt, this list is not complete and further additions or corrections are welcome.

1. Zürich 1809
2. Edinburgh 1822
3. Hamburger Schachklub 1830
4. Münchener SC 1836
5/6. Dundee / Philidor Leeuwarden 1847
7. Strijdt met Beleid, Nijmegen 1848
8. Oefening & Ontspanning, Kampen, 1849
9. Pallas, Deventer, 1849
10. Elberfelder Schachgesellschaft, 1851
11. Discendo Discimus, 1852
12. Karlsruher Schachfreunde, 1853
13. San Francisco Mechanics Institute Chess Club, 1854
14. Düsseldorfer Schachverein, 1854
15. Schachclub Ansbach, 1855
16. Aachener Schachverein, 1856
17. SK 1858 Giessen
18. Kölner Schachclub, 1861
19/20. SK Lasker Mannheim / Würzburger Schachverein 1865
21. Stockholm Chess Society, 1866
22/23. Bamberg / Aljechin Solingen 1868

Erik Olof
Zeist, The Netherlands

COLOPHON

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:
Dirk Jan ten Geuzendam
HONORARY EDITOR: Jan Timman
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR: Anish Giri
EDITORS: Peter Boel, René Olthof
ART-DIRECTION: Jan Scholtus
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THE NETHERLANDS

PHONE: 00-31-(0)72-51 27 137
SUBSCRIPTIONS: nic@newinchess.com
EDITORS: editors@newinchess.com
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INFOGRAPHIC

Fighting Father Time

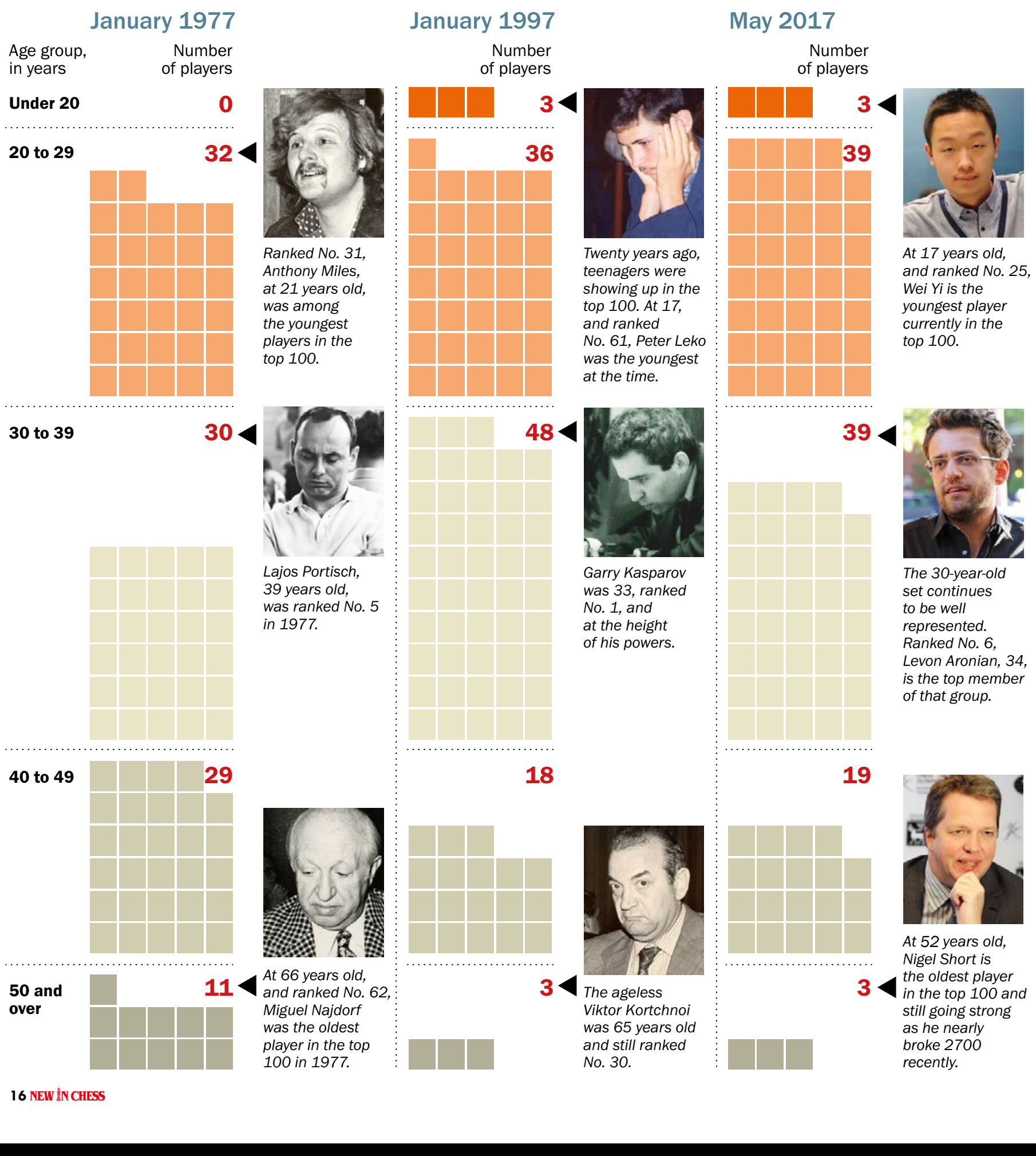
Nigel Short is well past the peak of his career when he was ranked No. 3 in the world and played for the World Championship. But his recent victory in the Bangkok Open and other fine results show that he is far from washed up at age 52. Indeed, his rating is once again flirting with 2700, and should he surpass that mark, he would become the oldest player to ever reach that level.

Despite Short's achievements, these days he is very much an outlier, reflecting how much the game has changed. Forty years ago, there were far more players over 50 in the top 100 -- and there were no teenagers. Now, there are as many teenagers in the top rankings as there are quinquagenarians. In addition, the number of players in their twenties has grown, almost matching the decline of the number of players who are in their forties.

The following graphic illustrates the changes in the top rankings as snapshots at roughly 20-year intervals.

DYLAN LOEB McCLAIN

Players in the top 100, by age group (Numbers exceed 100 because of ties in the rankings; each rectangle represents one player)


January 1977
January 1997
May 2017
Age group, in years
Number of players
Under 20
0
3
3
20 to 29
32
36
39
30 to 39
30
48
39
40 to 49
29
18
19
50 and over
11
3
3
Ranked No. 31, Anthony Miles, at 21 years old, was among the youngest players in the top 100.
Twenty years ago, teenagers were showing up in the top 100. At 17, and ranked No. 61, Peter Leko was the youngest at the time.
At 17 years old, and ranked No. 25, Wei Yi is the youngest player currently in the top 100.
Lajos Portisch, 39 years old, was ranked No. 5 in 1977.
Garry Kasparov was 33, ranked No. 1, and at the height of his powers.
The 30-year-old set continues to be well represented. Ranked No. 6, Levon Aronian, 34, is the top member of that group.
At 66 years old, and ranked No. 62, Miguel Najdorf was the oldest player in the top 100 in 1977.
The ageless Viktor Kortchnoi was 65 years old and still ranked No. 30.
At 52 years old, Nigel Short is the oldest player in the top 100 and still going strong as he nearly broke 2700 recently.

Fair & Square

Talulah Riley: 'Elon is brutally logical. The way he tackles everything is like playing chess pieces around. When he plays this scenario out in his head, it doesn't end well for people.'
(The English actress, who was twice married to tech billionaire Elon Musk, on her ex-husband's thought-process on complex technical matters)

Magnus Carlsen: 'I did yoga for a while. I haven't really meditated much. In general I like to be active so I do that for fun. It helps my chess. I think I should do more meditation because the few times I've done it I don't know if I've shown bad results but it definitely helped my mind be clearer.'
(The World Champion answering questions on his health routine, when addressing the Milken Institute's Global Conference in Los Angeles in early May)

Eric Sykes: 'I had lunch with a chess champion the other day. I knew he was a chess champion because it took him 20 minutes to pass the salt.'
(The late great British comedian/writer)

Donald Trump: 'We shouldn't be announcing all our moves. It is a chess game. I just don't want people to know what my thinking is. So eventually, he will have a better delivery system. And if that happens, we can't allow it to happen.' *(The US President turns up the chess rhetoric as he deals with Kim Jong-un and the North Korean missile crisis)*

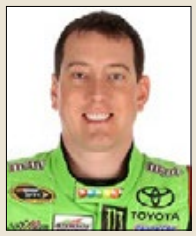
Sandy Duncan: 'Are all chess players ego-maniacs?' *(The American singer, dancer, comedian and actress on The Dick Cavett Show, circa early 1972, as she interrupted fellow guest Bobby Fischer)*

Garry Kasparov: 'I was worried playing Deep Blue that I was no longer invincible. I was sure the machine was not worrying about that!'
(The former World Champion during his April TED lecture on the future of AI, coming in the 20th anniversary of his loss to Deep Blue)

Steve Wilson: 'That was quite simply the move of a Grandmaster from the foot of Christian Eriksen!'
(The BBC Match of the Day commentator during the Chelsea v Spurs FA Cup semi-final at Wembley, as Eriksen's pin-point pass onto the foot of Dele Alli allowed the Spurs forward to equalize)

Ali Harper: 'Sienna Rivers, ex-nerd, undisputed reigning chess champion of the class of '09 and the proverbial all round wise-ass degenerate pain in your backside.' *(The young author's description of the main character from her best-selling book series, Beautiful Bedlam)*

Brad Keselowski: 'You've still got to get over the wrecks and the big packs and all those things you know you're susceptible to. You still have to get over that, and that's a tough challenge, but the moves to me are like a game of chess, and I enjoy that game.'
(The four-time Talladega winner, on what it takes to be a top NASCAR driver)



Kyle Busch: 'Once you get down into the nitty gritty of the race and try to play the chess game at the end of the race, you've got to really pick and choose your spots and think all the time if you go here and team up with this guy. It really wears on you a little bit, mentally.'
(The leading NASCAR driver, on what it takes to win Daytona)

Peter Leko: 'I never in my life tried coffee… I basically also never in my life tried beer.'
(Admitted the former world title challenger during his live commentary at the Grenke Chess Classic)

Peter Svidler: 'The old Soviet school of count the number of pawn islands still holds true after all these years.'

Toba Beta: 'Life is more than just chess. Though king dies, life goes on.' *(The Indonesian economist and sci-fi writer, whose books include Master of Stupidity and My Ancestor Was an Ancient Astronaut)*

Cautious Manoeuvres in Moscow

Fighting Ding Liren deserved winner as Grand Prix turns into another draw fest

Calculating overall chances continued to prevail over calculating deep variations in the second leg of the FIDE Grand Prix, with lots of short draws as a result. Two players left Moscow in high spirits. The combative Ding Liren finished clear first and earned the maximum 170 GP points. The calculating Shakhriyar Mamedyarov finished second and took the lead in the GP standings. The Azeri also burst into the world Top-10 with a 2800 rating! **ERWIN L'AMI** reports, with additional analysis by **Anish Giri.**

The fight for two spots in the 2018 Candidates' tournament continued in the second Grand Prix that was held in Moscow. Deja-vu is very much the key word when I look back upon the tournament and compare what we saw in the Russian capital with Maxime Vachier-Lagrave's impressions from the first GP in Sharjah in the previous issue of New In Chess. In short, I could not agree more that the GP series is in desperate need of the Sofia rules or any other rule that forces or encourages the players to provide better entertainment. As it is now, once players reached their desired plus score, safety-first became the highest priority. As a result, we once again witnessed an endless succession of premature draws. In this day and age, such a high number of short and lame games should no longer be part of our game.

The idea of letting 18 people battle it out in a nine-round Swiss under Sofia rules or something similar, instead of having a 12-player round-robin, as in the previous GP cycle, could actually prove a real improvement. Wild-cards for players like Hou Yifan add colour and excitement to the events and giving more players a chance to enter the cycle can only be lauded.

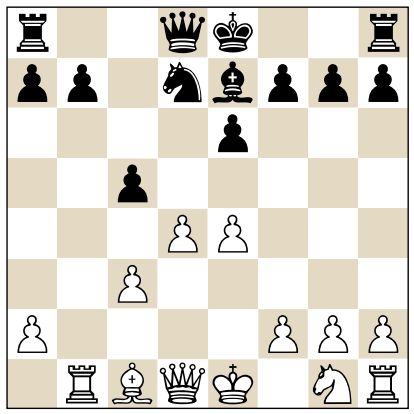
Deja-vu was also the prevailing feeling when I followed the games online via the official website, which

At the end of the Moscow Grand Prix, FIDE President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov placed the winner's medal around Ding Liren's neck.

showed no signs of the much needed improvements. Since I was in Moscow as Anish Giri's second, I always accompanied him to the venue, but once the first moves had been made, I would return to the hotel to keep an eye on the proceedings from there. The broadcast was bearable, but it was not pleasant, and it was certainly not the wonderful experience they proclaimed it to be when they offered access for 10 euros for the entire event (or 25 for the entire GP cycle). I honestly consider this a pity, because it provides ammunition to those who believe that live games from any chess event should be free to be copied elsewhere. Despite the fact that past court cases have given chess websites carte blanche to do so, the question whether this is morally just remains debatable. If an organizer invests a lot of money and energy to organize a top-notch event and attract sponsors, only to find his live broadcast copied and shown elsewhere, I can understand that he is not happy. Having said that, Agon's current website does not have sufficient quality to support the moral argument I just mentioned.

But enough negativity! Playing in the heart of Moscow was a joy for all the players, and both the hotel and the playing hall were of the highest level. The players were staying at the sumptuous Hyatt Ararat [where the 2004 Armenia vs. the Rest of the World match was held with Kasparov on Board 1 for Armenia – ed.] and the games were played in the Telegraph Building, which had also been the venue of the 2016 Candidates' tournament. Chess obviously has strong roots in Russia, and a visit to the beautifully renovated Central Chess Club on Gogolevsky Boulevard (I had last visited the club in 2005) confirmed that once again.

And obviously, not all games ended in draws! Hou Yifan, just as in the Grenke Classic, took an early lead when Ian Nepomniachtchi grabbed a poisoned pawn.



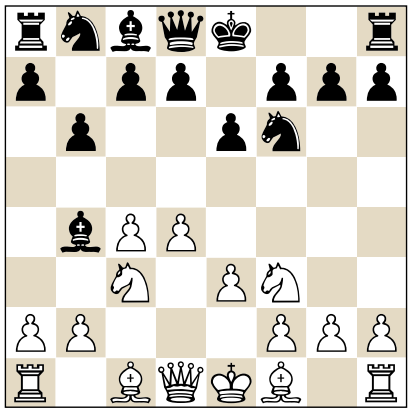
Nepomniachtchi-Hou Yifan
Moscow 2017 (1)
position after 9...♘xd7

Here **10.♖xb7?** was a rare lapse on Nepomniachtchi's part, perhaps because he was counting on the immediate 10...♘b6, when White has

many attractive options, of which 11.♕g4! is probably the best. Instead, **10...cxd4 11.cxd4 ♘b6** saw White's rook getting trapped on b7 without much to show for it. Despite stiff resistance Nepo eventually lost.

It would be the start of a topsy-turvy event for Nepo, who won two games but then lost three, with the result that he failed to play a role of any significance. For Hou Yifan the first round was the basis of a good tournament, resulting in a +1 score. After a tough period in which she gave up the women's world title, caused a stir in Gibraltar and even dropped out of the top 100, the number one female player in the world seems to be firmly back on track!

Given his rapid rise in the live ratings on 2700chess.com, all eyes were also on Shakhriyar Mamedyarov. Shakh did not disappoint, because he won two of his first four games and then cruised to the end of the tournament. Anish Giri provides insight in Mamedyarov's win over Mickey Adams in Round 3.



This was fashionable a couple of years ago, and from time to time this healthy set-up is still seen at the highest level.

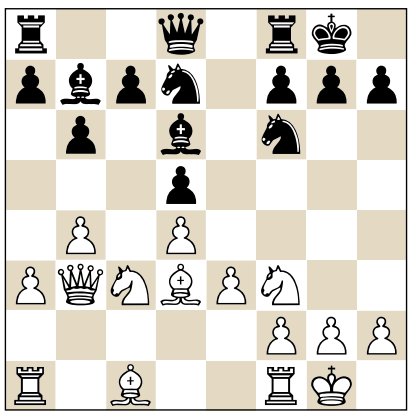
5...♗b7 6.♗d3 0-0 7.0-0 d5

One of the classical ways of developing and not a surprising choice coming from Michael Adams, who likes his black openings healthy.

8.cxd5 exd5 9.a3 ♗d6 10.b4

The other plan of going for ♘e5 and f4 is highly ambitious, but also strategically risky, since Black will counter with ...c5.

10...♘bd7 11.♕b3



11...a6

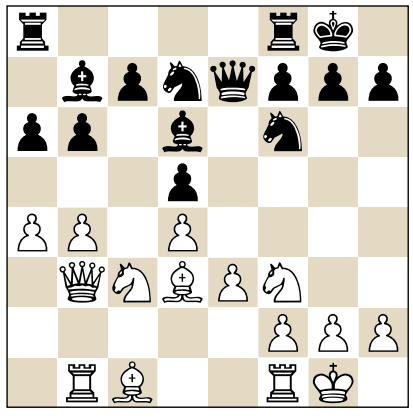
Deviating from his recent game against Yu Yangyi. I suspect Michael wanted to avoid Mamedyarov's preparation.

11...c6 12.a4 a5 was played in Yu Yangyi-Adams in Shenzhen. It is hard to say whether White had any pressure there, but it did seem like it. Instead of 12.a4, White could also have thought about ideas connected with an e3-e4 break.

12.a4 ♕e7

12...c6 is another option with both advantages and drawbacks.

13.♖b1



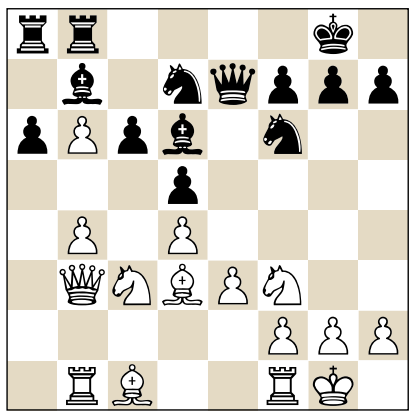
13...c6 Allowing b5 would isolate the d5-pawn.

13...♘e4 is a well-known strategic mistake: 14.♘xd5! ♗xd5 15.♕xd5 ♘c3 16.♕b3 ♘xb1 17.♕xb1 h6 18.b5 axb5 19.axb5, and White gets too many trumps in return for the exchange.

14.a5 ♖fb8 The strategy of focusing on the queenside eventually leads to a disaster, but this move is probably still fine.

14...b5 is always a questionable decision when ...♘b6-♘c4 is not on the cards. I refer to Erwin l'Ami's masterclass against little Praggu's sister on how to handle such pawn structures (l'Ami-Vaishali, Reykjavik Open 2017, 1-0).

15.axb6



15...♗c8 A very clever positional idea – the bishop moves to a more promising diagonal, the b-file opens, the b4-pawn comes under attack – but tactically it just won't wash. White is too quick to shift to the kingside.

15...a5!? is too risky a decision, but Black may eventually pick up the weak b6-pawn and get closer to Drawland.

NOTES BY
Anish Giri

Shakhriyar Mamedyarov
Michael Adams
Moscow 2017 (3)
Nimzo-Indian Defence

Mamedyarov was obviously on fire before this event, both in Shamkir and in the Russian League, but having started with two draws he was yet to prove that this particular streak wasn't over.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4

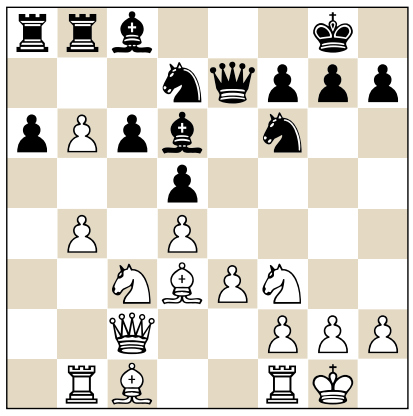
The QGD approach of 3...d5 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 ended badly for Adams in his game against Mamedyarov in the Sharjah Grand Prix earlier this year.

4.♘f3 b6 5.e3

15...♘xb6 is very simple, when White will be slightly better after 16.e4! dxe4 17.♘xe4 ♘xe4 18.♖e1 ♕c7 19.♗xe4 ♘d5, but here Black will be in time to switch back to the kingside to stave off immediate disaster.

16.♕c2!

Here it became clear that Black already was in very serious trouble. In time-trouble already, Michael was no longer able to keep his ship afloat, and it went straight to the bottom.



16...♘xb6?!

16...♖xb6 17.♘a4 ♖bb8!? is not pretty after the simple 18.♗d2, but at least Black will survive to suffer for a long, long time. It is important that the d7-knight will be able to join the kingside after 17.e4.

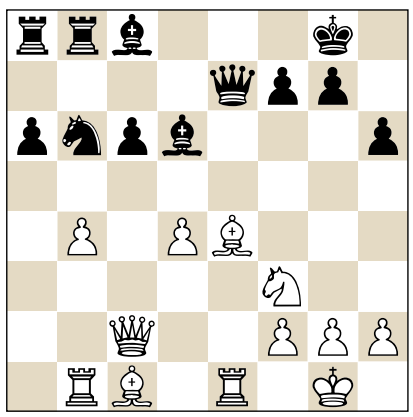
16...♗xb4 17.♘e5 is no picnic either.

17.e4

Too obvious for an exclam!

17...dxe4 18.♘xe4 ♘xe4 19.♗xe4 h6 20.♖e1

White is at the very least going to win a pawn now.



20...♕c7?!

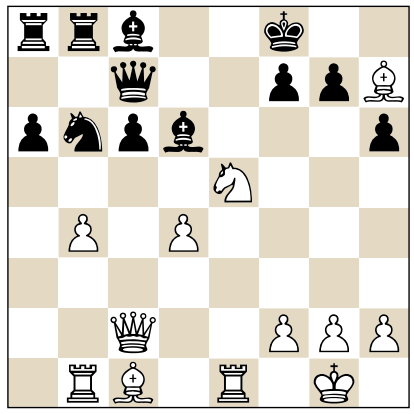
This was Black's last chance to put up serious resistance. The queen should have moved closer to the king. The c6-pawn had to go for no compensation.

After 20...♕f8! 21.♗xc6 it's just a pawn, but the game continues and who knows but Black may survive this once he reaches a pawn-down endgame.

21.♗h7+!

Now the black king is targeted!

21...♔f8 22.♘e5!



If you had seen the way in which this move was executed, you would have known that mate was not far away.

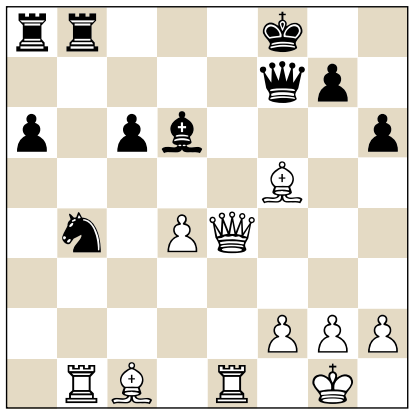
22...♘d5

22...♗e6 looks incredibly dangerous as well, for example 23.♘g6+ ♔e8 24.f4, and Black is unlikely to survive.

23.♘xf7! ♕xf7 24.♗g6 ♗f5 25.♗xf5 ♘xb4

25...♖e8 would have prolonged the game somewhat, but after 26.♗d2 Black's position is already beyond salvation.

26.♕e4!



With ♗e6 there to block the e-file, Black's position is dead lost.

26...♘d5 27.♗e6 ♕f6 28.♖xb8+ ♖xb8 29.♕h7 g5 30.♕g8+

Knockout! Black resigned.

■ ■ ■

MARIA EMELIANOVA

After two exciting wins, Shakhriyar Mamedyarov seemed to be satisfied. In the remainder of the event he spent as little time as possible in the playing hall.

Class of 2800

With his excellent recent results, **Shakhriyar Mamedyarov** raised his Elo rating to exactly 2800, climbing to 5th place in the June 1 FIDE World rankings. The Azeri reached his peak in the live ratings on May 15: 2801.1. These are the peak ratings of the 13 players that the 2800 Club now consists of:

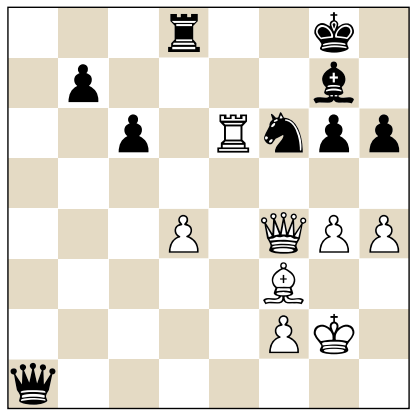
1. **Carlsen** 2889.2 – 21 April 2014
2. **Kasparov** 2856.7 – 3 March 2000
3. **Caruana** 2851.3 – 8 October 2014
4. **Aronian** 2835.5 – 2 February 2014
5. **Topalov** 2826.5 – 24 August 2015
6. **So** 2824.5 – 1 April 2017
7. **Anand** 2820.7 – 26 January 2011
8. **Vachier-Lagrave** 2819.3 – 28 July 2016
9. **Nakamura** 2819.0 – 23 August 2015
10. **Kramnik** 2817.8 – 2 October 2016
11. **Grischuk** 2813.6 – 15 February 2015
12. **Giri** 2802.8 – 15 February 2015
13. **Mamedyarov** 2801.1 – 15 May 2017

(source: *2700chess.com*)

Shakhriyar Mamedyarov Career highlights

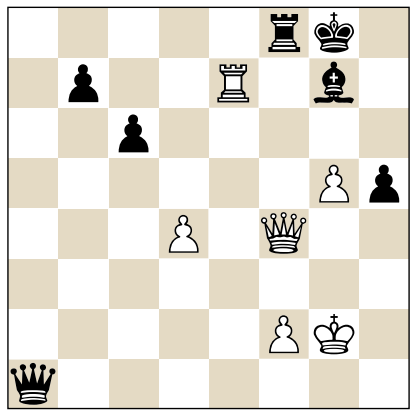
1985:	April 12: Born in Sumgait, Azerbaijan
2003:	World Junior Champion
2004:	Wins Dubai Open
2005:	World Junior Champion (The only player to win the title twice)
2006:	Shared first Reykjavik Open
2006:	Wins Hoogeveen
2007:	Wins Hoogeveen
2009:	European Team Champion with Azerbaijan
2010:	Shared first President's Cup Baku
2010:	Shared first Tal Memorial Moscow
2011:	Wins Ordix Open Frankfurt
2013:	Wins Geneva Chess Masters
2013:	Wins Beijing Grand Prix
2013:	European Team Champion with Azerbaijan
2013:	World Rapid Champion
2014:	Wins Tal Memorial Moscow
2016:	Wins Gashimov Memorial Shamkir
2017:	Shared first in Sharjah Grand Prix
2017:	Wins Gashimov Memorial Shamkir
2017:	Russian Club Champion with Sibir-Sirius
2017:	Runner-up Moscow Grand Prix
2017:	June 1: #5 in the world, rated 2800

Despite a little wobble, Round 4 also turned out well for the Azeri.

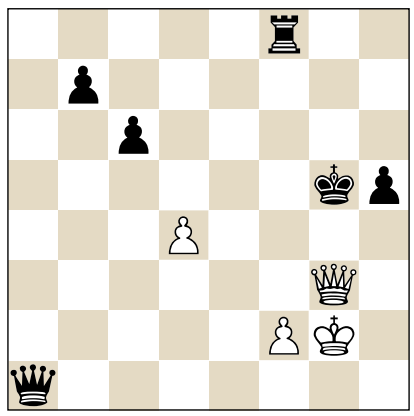


Salem-Mamedyarov
Moscow 2017 (4)
position after 34...♕xa1

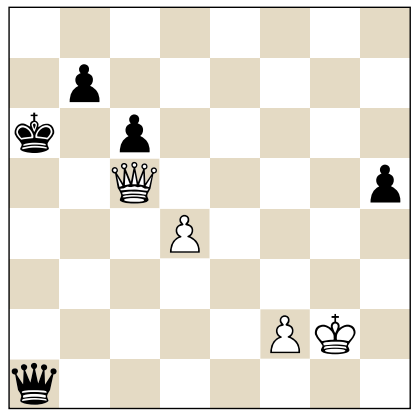
Being a piece down and seeing that 35.♖xf6 ♗xf6 36.♕xf6 ♕xd4 37.♕xg6+ ♕g7 doesn't look promising, Salem goes for his last chance... **35.g5 hxg5 36.hxg5 ♘h5?**... and gets rewarded! Instead, 36...♘h7 should have ensured victory. Shakhriyar had counted on **37.♗xh5 gxh5 38.♖e7 ♖f8** only to realize to his horror that



39.♖xg7+! ♔xg7 40.♕e5+ ♔g6 41.♕d6+ ♔xg5 42.♕g3+!



is a fantastic perpetual resource. But is it really perpetual check? Shakh ran his king all over the board with **42...♔h6 43.♕d6+ ♔g7 44.♕g3+ ♔f7 45.♕f4+ ♔e6 46.♕e5+ ♔d7 47.♕g7+ ♔c8 48.♕xf8+ ♔c7 49.♕e7+ ♔b6 50.♕c5+ ♔a6**



And now 51.♕c4+ ♔a7 52.d5!? would have been the crown on Salem's work, one sample line running 52...♕f6 53.dxc6! ♕xc6+ 54.♕xc6 bxc6 55.f4 ♔b7 56.♔g3, and the pawn ending is drawn.

Instead, **51.f4?!** followed, and after another few mistakes Shakh gradually reeled in the point.

Mamedyarov seemed to be satisfied after these two wins and in the remainder of the event he spent as little time as possible in the playing hall, drawing all his games.

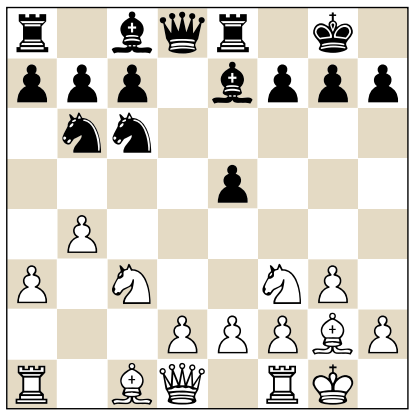
On the June 1st FIDE rating list, Shakhriyar will add 28 points to his rating, catapulting him to exactly 2800. He is also leading the GP-standings, so 2017 is looking great for the Azeri thus far!

Another player who is having a great 2017 is Ding Liren. Ding won the Shenzhen super-tournament in April and took that form to Moscow. Back-to-back wins in Rounds 2 and 3 immediately yielded the Chinese player the lead, together with Mamedyarov. However, where the Azeri decelerated, Ding kept going full tilt in all his games. Although certainly not flawless, his encounter with Vachier-Lagrave was very worthwhile.

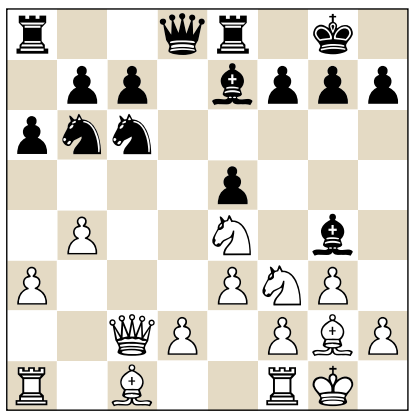
NOTES BY
Erwin l'Ami

Ding Liren
Maxime Vachier-Lagrave
Moscow 2017 (6)
English Opening, Four Knights

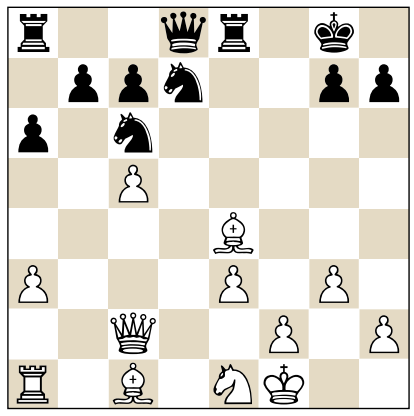
1.c4 e5 2.g3 ♘f6 3.♗g2 d5 4.cxd5 ♘xd5 5.♘f3 ♘c6 6.0-0 ♘b6 7.♘c3 ♗e7 8.a3 0-0 9.b4 ♖e8 Less common than 9...♗e6, but MVL had played this way before and Ding came prepared for it.



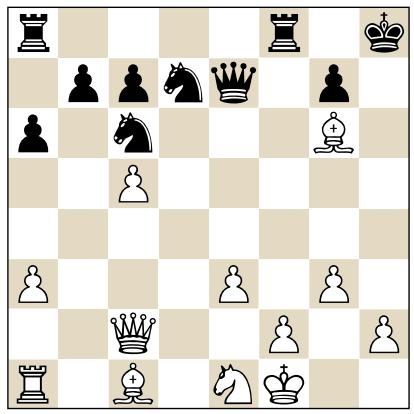
10.e3!? Black's idea is that 10.b5 ♘d4 11.♘xe5 will not win a pawn because 11...♗f6 will force White to return it. A number of games have continued 12.f4 ♗xe5 13.fxe5 ♖xe5 14.e3 ♘xb5 15.♘xb5 ♖xb5, when White has compensation but Black is certainly OK. The game continuation is rare but logical; White takes away the d4-square and renews the threat of b4-b5.
10...a6 11.♕c2 ♗g4 12.♘e4!



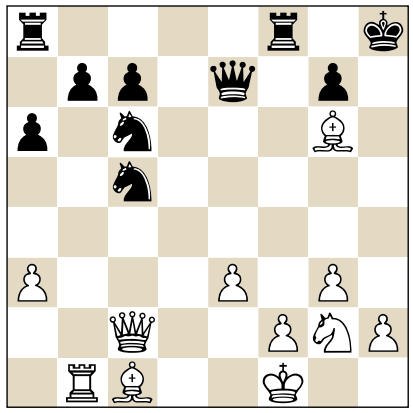
The first really 'new' move, involving a deep strategic exchange sacrifice.
12...f5 13.♘c5 e4 14.♘e1 ♗e2 Black is forced to join the dance.
15.d3 ♗xf1 16.♔xf1 ♗xc5 17.bxc5 ♘d7 18.dxe4 fxe4 19.♗xe4
With a pawn for the exchange, dominance over the light squares and potentially raging bishops there is obviously plenty of compensation.



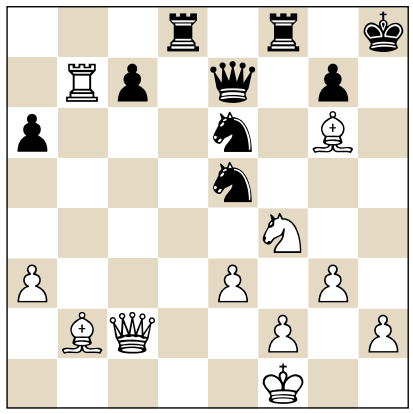
19...♕e7
A typical tricky MVL-esque way of approaching the position. I am sure most participants would have simply played 19...♘f6 to cover the h7-pawn and attack the bishop on e4. As simple as that!
20.♗xh7+ ♔h8 21.♗g6 ♖f8



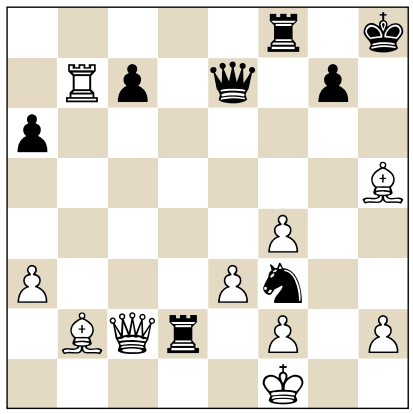
22.♖b1
Less direct than 22.♕e2!? ♖xf2+! (not 22...♕xc5 23.♗b2 ♕g5 24.♗c2, when the bishops reign supreme) 23.♕xf2 (23.♔xf2 ♕f6+ 24.♔g1 ♕xg6 gives Black good play) 23...♖f8 24.♗f5 g6 25.e4 gxf5 26.exf5 ♕e4, and Black has counterplay.
But I like the look of 22.♘g2!? ♘ce5 (22...♕xc5 23.♕e2 is dangerous) 23.♗b2 ♘xg6 24.♕xg6, when the knight will go to f4, and the bishop will find a great spot on d4 as well.
22...♘xc5 23.♘g2



23...♖ad8 23...♕d6! 24.♘f4 ♘e5, with the annoying threat of 25...♖xf4!, would have kept the balance.
24.♘f4 ♘e6 Correct, since the knight on f4 can't be allowed to stay there too long. **25.♖xb7 ♘e5 26.♗b2** This allows Black to escape. The positional 26.♗e4, keeping the bishop pair and postponing ♗b2 until the next move, would have retained a huge advantage.



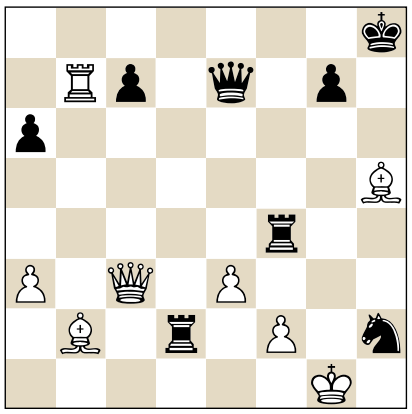
26...♘f3? This move is very tempting, but it was absolutely essential to trade on f4 and g6: 26...♘xf4 27.gxf4 ♘xg6 28.♕xg6, and here both 28...♖b8 and 28...♖d6!? maintain the balance. White's king can also be weak in some lines.
27.♗h5 ♘xf4 28.gxf4 ♖d2



Scary-looking, but Ding has it covered!
29.♕c3 ♘xh2+ 30.♔g1

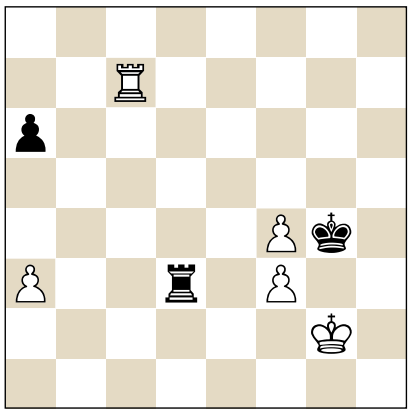
Presumably missing/underestimating Black's answer. Instead, 30.♔e1! ♖d7 31.♕c6 ♖fd8 32.♗e2! is a nice little regrouping that leaves Black hopeless.

30...♖xf4!



31.♕xg7+ Now 31.exf4? ♕e1+ 32.♔xh2 ♕xf2+ 33.♔h3 ♕h2+ 34.♔g4 ♖g2+ 35.♔f5 ♕xh5+ 36.♔e6 ♕e8+ 37.♔d5 ♖d2+! would even be winning for Black. **31...♕xg7+ 32.♗xg7+ ♔xg7 33.exf4 ♔h6! 34.♔xh2 ♔xh5 35.♖xc7 ♔g4 36.♔g2 ♖d3?!** The most technical solution, I believe, was 36...♖d4! 37.f5 ♔g5 38.f6 ♔g6 39.f7 ♔g7, when Black's rook will do a good job on a4.

37.f3+

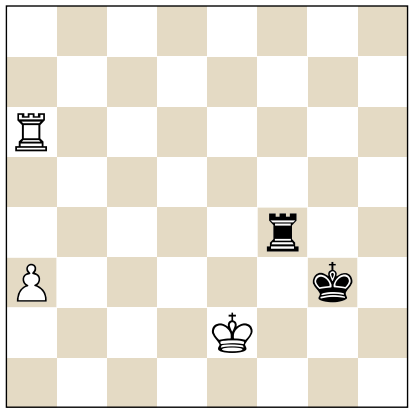


37...♔h5!?

MVL is no fan of passive defending, and although 37...♔xf4 38.♖c4+ ♔f5 39.♖a4 ♖d6 is by no means lost, compared to the note to Black's 36st move it is already pretty unpleasant, given the active position of White's rook.

38.a4

38.♖c5+ ♔h4 39.♖a5 was a better test, but here, too, 39...♖d2+ 40.♔f1 ♔g3 41.♔e1 ♖d3 42.♖xa6 ♖xf3 43.♔e2 ♖xf4



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

is a theoretical draw. I would refer you to all the endgame manuals out there!

38...♖d4 39.♖c5+ ♔h4 40.♔f2 ♖xa4 41.♔e3 a5 42.♖g5 ♖a3+ 43.♔e4 ♖a4+ 44.♔e5 ♖b4 45.♖g4+ ♔h5 46.f5 ♖b5+ 47.♔e6 ♖b6+ 48.♔e7 ♖b7+ 49.♔e6 ♖b6+ 50.♔f7 ♖b7+ 51.♔g8 ♖b8+ 52.♔g7 ♖b7+ Draw.

■ ■ ■

It was only in the very last round that Ding got rewarded for his fighting spirit and secured sole victory. Anish Giri will take you through the game that decided the winner of the Moscow Grand Prix.

Moscow 2017

			PTS	TPR	GP-PTS
1	Ding Liren	2773	6	2870	170
2	Shakhriyar Mamedyarov	2772	5½	2813	140
3	Hou Yifan	2652	5	2770	71
4	Teimour Radjabov	2710	5	2800	71
5	Peter Svidler	2755	5	2776	71
6	Alexander Grischuk	2750	5	2775	71
7	Hikaru Nakamura	2786	5	2776	71
8	Maxime Vachier-Lagrave	2795	5	2760	71
9	Anish Giri	2785	5	2759	71
10	Boris Gelfand	2724	4½	2754	20
11	Evgeny Tomashevsky	2696	4½	2746	20
12	Pentala Harikrishna	2750	4½	2716	20
13	Jon Ludvig Hammer	2621	4	2674	7
14	Francisco Vallejo	2710	4	2681	7
15	Ian Nepomniachtchi	2751	3½	2626	3
16	Salem Saleh	2633	3½	2654	3
17	Michael Adams	2747	3½	2654	3
18	Ernesto Inarkiev	2727	2½	2548	1

18 players, 9 rounds

NOTES BY
Anish Giri

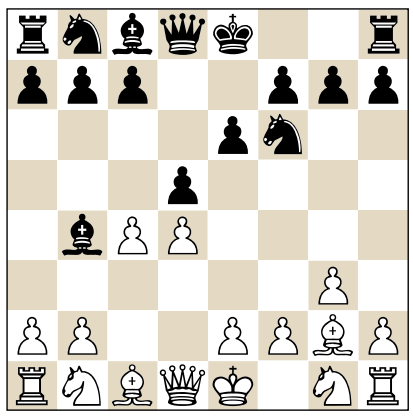
Boris Gelfand
Ding Liren
Moscow 2017 (9)
Bogo-Indian Defence

Since Boris Gelfand was trailing the leaders, Ding Liren and Mamedyarov, by half a point going into the final round, it was not hard to guess his intentions. The pressure was on!

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3

In Moscow, Boris had already shown some ideas in the Catalan, so I don't think this came as a big surprise.

3...d5 4.♗g2 ♗b4+



The system that Tomashevsky used against Gelfand in the same tournament and the one I had used against Ding himself the day before. 4... ♗e7 is the established main-line. Boring as hell.

5.♗d2 ♗e7 6.♘f3 0-0 7.0-0 ♘bd7

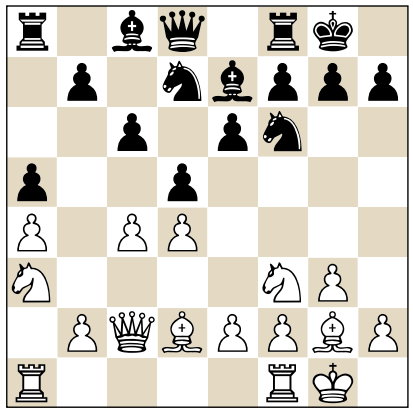
The move order subtleties matter if White does not intend to put his queen on c2 and starts with a move like ♗f4.

8.a4!?

This has become trendy of late. The idea of including 8.a4 a5 is that if Black develops with the otherwise standard ...b6, White will capture cxd5 cxd5, and the b5-square becomes weak.

8...a5 9.♕c2 c6 10.♘a3

The waiting move ♖d1/♖c1 was also possible here, since the knight often has to return to b1-c3 anyway, but such nuances you have to figure out for yourself.

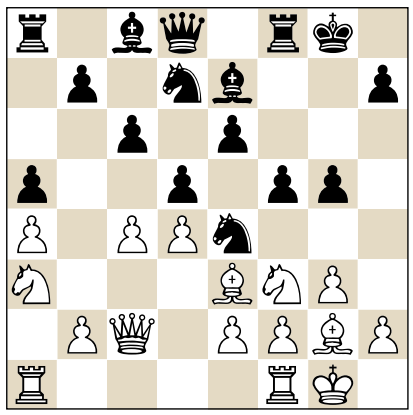


10...♘e4 Very natural. Tomashevsky allowed Boris to play ♘e1 in one of the earlier rounds, stopping ♘e4, and although Evgeny eventually got a fine position, I am sure Boris had prepared an improvement.

11.♗f4

To provoke ...g5 or not to provoke ...g5, that is the question.

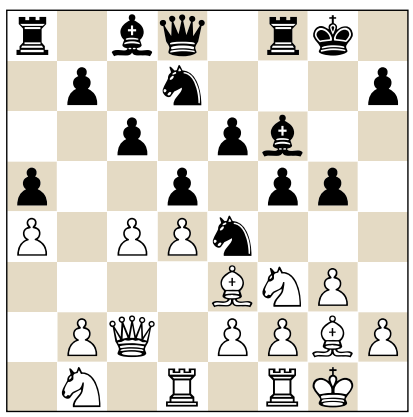
11...g5 12.♗e3 f5



Black has got a luxury version of a Stonewall. But it is still a Stonewall. I suppose this was what Boris had been counting on.

13.♖ad1 ♗f6 One of the solid ways to arrange the pieces. The standard ...♗d6, ...♕e7 regrouping may be slightly less attractive with the pawn already on g5.

14.♘b1



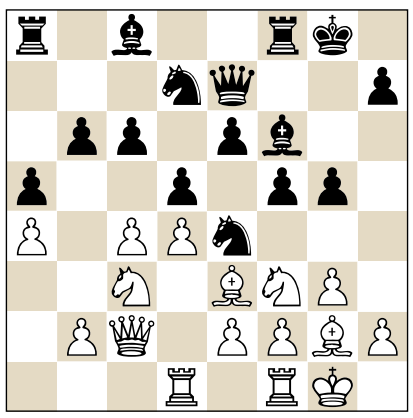
MARIA EMELIANOVA

Boris Gelfand appears not too happy about the turn his game against Ding Liren has taken. Hikaru Nakamura seems to share his misgivings.

Boris kept making his moves with confidence, but since Black has only made natural moves, how bad can this really be for him?

14...♕e7 15.♘c3 b6

With cxd5 no longer on the cards, Black continues to develop naturally.



16.♘e5!?

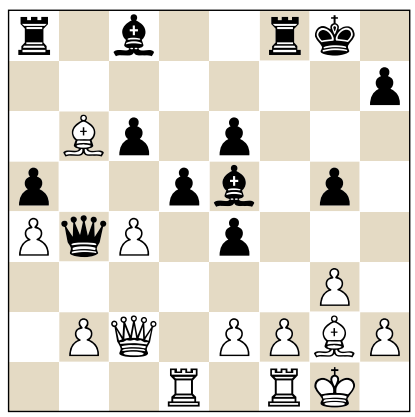
White comes up with an interesting idea, using the fact that Black still has to mobilize his queenside. 16.cxd5 cxd5 17.♘b5 would see the knight stray too far: 17...♗a6 18.♖c1 ♖ac8 19.♕b3, with an unclear position, but one in which Black has plenty of ideas to choose from.

16...♘xe5 17.dxe5 ♗xe5 18.♗xb6?!

Natural, but White could have played more cunningly.

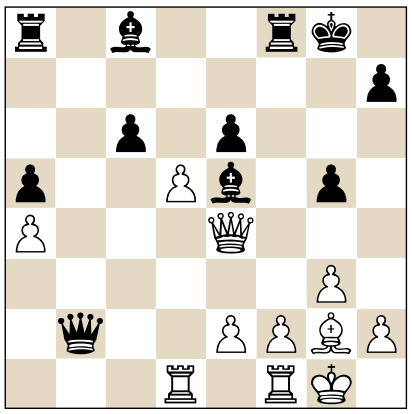
After 18.♘xe4! fxe4 19.c5!? Black still has the impressive pawn block in the centre, but he is likely to lose its mainstay, the e4-pawn: 19...bxc5 (19...b5 20.axb5 cxb5 21.♗xe4! hello!) 20.♗xc5 ♗d6 21.♗xd6 ♕xd6, and now either piece can take on e4. I would prefer 22.♕xe4, with an unclear position, but White shouldn't be too unhappy with it. Objectively, it is still equal.

18...♕b4 A good move. **19.♘xe4 fxe4**



20.cxd5?! Boris probably realized himself that this was going a bit too far, but normal play would have conceded that his concept had failed. After 20.♗e3 ♕xb2 21.♕xb2 ♗xb2 22.♗xg5 ♗a6 Black is very comfortable, although after 23.♖d2 ♗e5 24.cxd5 cxd5 25.f3 the game is clearly heading for a draw.

20...♕xb6 21.♕xe4 ♕xb2!

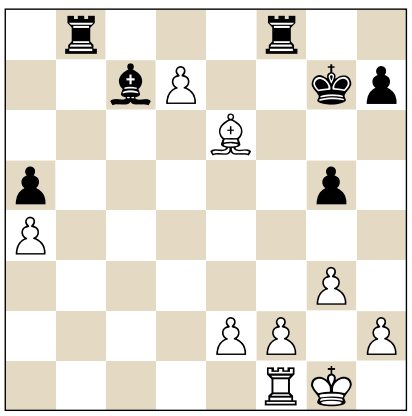


Black was doing well, but Ding was not seeing any ghosts, and it was here that it probably dawned on everyone that this was not going to end well for White.

22.dxc6 ♗c7 23.♖d7

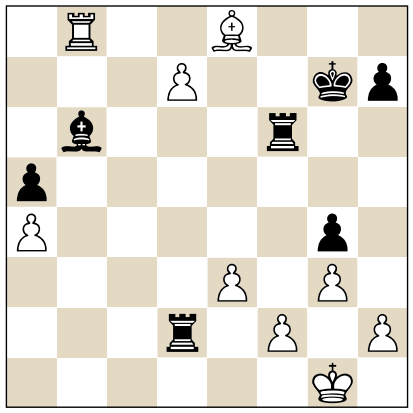
This is sheer desperation. Unfortunately for Boris, Ding didn't even blink.

23...♗xd7 24.cxd7 ♕f6 25.♗h3 ♖ab8 26.♕xe6+ ♕xe6 27.♗xe6+ ♔g7



Black will slowly but surely convert his rook. The rest is straightforward.

28.♖c1 ♔f6 29.♗g4 ♗d8 30.♖c6+ ♔g7 31.♗h5 ♖b2 32.♖c8 ♖d2 33.♗e8 ♗b6 34.♖b8 ♖f6 35.e3 g4

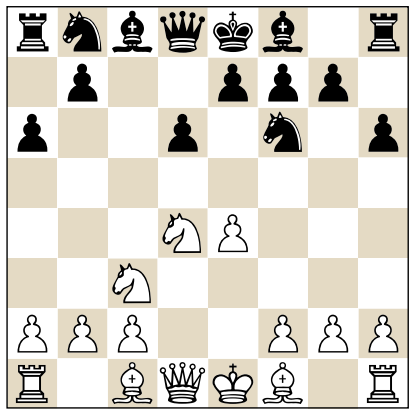


On top of all the other things, ...♖dxf2 will threaten mate in three. White resigned. A cold-blooded win by Ding Liren.

■ ■ ■

It was unanimously agreed that Ding was a very deserving winner of this Grand Prix, the second of four. Notching up the full 170 points (to finish unshared first) also meant a huge leap in the general standings. For the other favourites the second leg left a rather bitter taste. Anish Giri and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave never quite got their tournament going, while Nakamura could even call himself lucky that Peter Svidler didn't realize the size of his advantage in the final position of their last-round game when a draw was agreed.

Together with Hou Yifan, Teimour Radjabov and Alexander Grischuk, they were the players who finished on +1, all of them receiving 71.4 GP-points. It should be mentioned that Grischuk was ill at the start of the event. His game against MVL contained an interesting opening experiment.



Grischuk-Vachier-Lagrave
Moscow 2017 (4)

Huh? Right. How did this position arise with White to move? Answer at the bottom of the article.

Following the first two over-cautious legs in Sharjah and Moscow, I expect a lot more action in the next events in Geneva and Mallorca, since many players will be fighting for their last chance. For the moment, Mamedyarov and Ding Liren are doing very well at the top of the general standings, but with hundreds of GP-points still to be distributed it's obviously way too early to draw any final conclusions. ■

(Answer: 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e3 ♘g4 7.♗c1 ♘f6 8.♗e3 ♘g4 9.♗g5 h6 10.♗c1 ♘f6, and now, after 11.♗d3!? the point is that including h7-h6 can sometimes be harmful for Black. Food for thought!)

FIDE Grand Prix 2017 standings

		Sharjah	Moscow	TOTAL
1	Shakhriyar Mamedyarov	140	140	280
2	Ding Liren	70	170	240
3	Maxime Vachier-Lagrave	140	71	211
3	Alexander Grischuk	140	71	211
5	Hikaru Nakamura	70	71	141
6	Hou Yifan	7	71	78
7	Michael Adams	70	3	73
7	Ian Nepomniachtchi	70	3	73
9	Anish Giri		71	71
9	Peter Svidler		71	71
9	Teimour Radjabov		71	71
12	Dmitry Jakovenko	70		70
13	Francisco Vallejo	25	7	32
14	Pavel Eljanov	25		25
14	Li Chao	25		25
14	Richard Rapport	25		25
17	Evgeny Tomashevsky	3	20	23
18	Pentala Harikrishna		20	20
18	Boris Gelfand		20	20
20	Jon Ludvig Hammer	3	7	10
21	Levon Aronian	7		7
22	Salem Saleh	3	3	6
23	Ernesto Inarkiev		1	1
23	Alexander Riazantsev	1		1
	2 Legs to go: Geneva and Palma			

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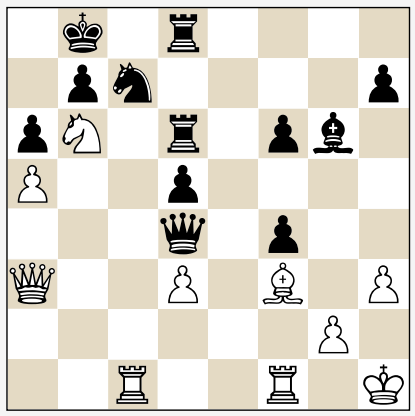
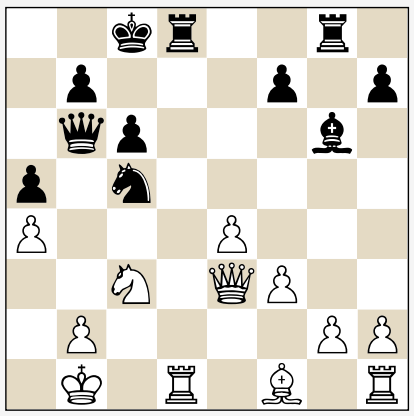
Find the best move in the positions below

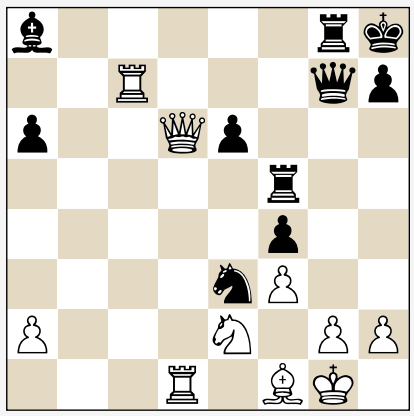
Solutions on page 87



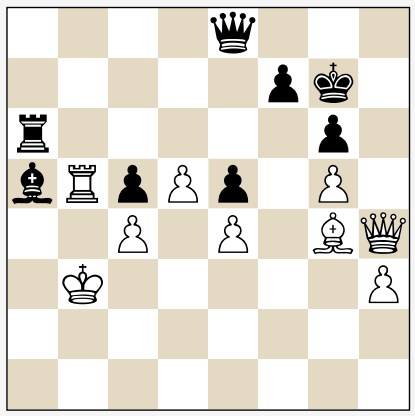
1. White to play



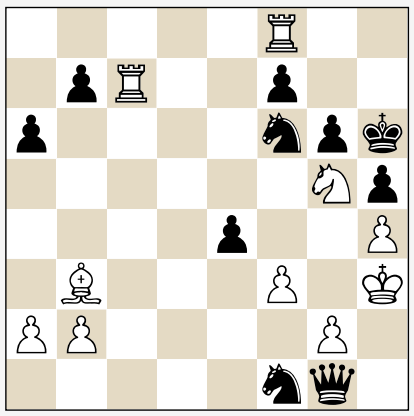
2. Black to play



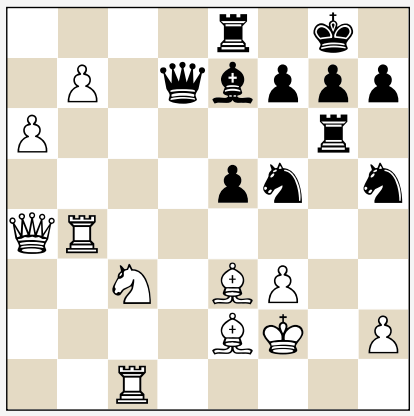
3. Black to play



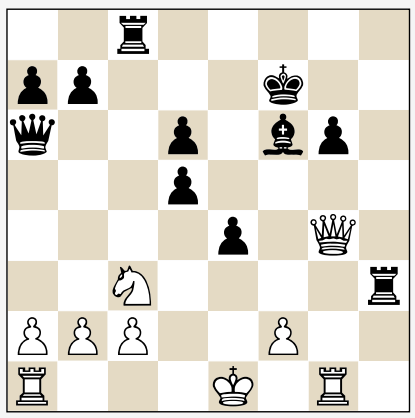
4. White to play



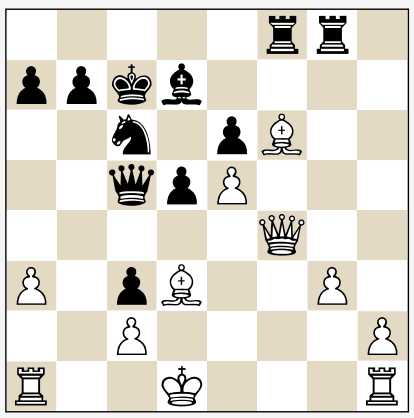
5. White to play



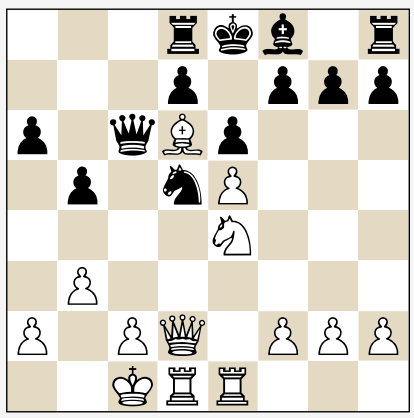
6. Black to play



7. Black to play



8. Black to play



9. White to play

Jan Timman

Mamedyarov on the move

Just like last year, Shakhriyar Mamedyarov won the Gashimov Memorial in Shamkir. With adventurous and daring play the Azeri number one shot up into the world's top 10. In JAN TIMMAN's view 'Shakh' must be regarded as a serious candidate in the current World Championship cycle.

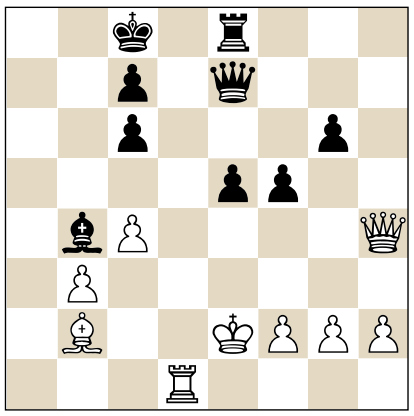
The Gashimov Memorial, held for the fourth time now, seems to be en route to becoming a permanent fixture in the chess calendar. The tournament in Shamkir is a tribute to Vugar Gashimov, the Azeri grandmaster who tragically died at the age of 27 in 2014. There aren't many of such memorials. The Capablanca Memorial in Cuba has been held annually since 1962, the Vidmar Memorial has been organized twenty times, and of course there is the Tal Memorial, a more recent tradition that tends to lure the world's best players to Moscow.

This year, the organizers in Shamkir, a small city at a one-hour flight from Azerbaijan's capital Baku, had a hard time putting together an elite field comparable to the first three editions because of the clash with the Zurich Chess Challenge, the Grenke Classic and the Reykjavik Open. The three American stars that had played the US Championship shortly before were now in different cities: Caruana was in Karlsruhe and Baden-Baden, Nakamura in Zurich, and So in Shamkir. Carlsen, the winner of the first two Gashimov Memorials, was playing in the Grenke Classic.

Some people would have it that a tournament without Carlsen is less interesting, an opinion that was proven groundless once again in Shamkir. The tournament was interesting in all stages, and each round yielded at least two very worthwhile games. It is hard to pinpoint exactly how the right conditions for fighting chess are created. Practice has shown that bringing in the points system used in soccer – three points for a win – has had minimal effect; it's the mind-set of the participants that counts. The invitation policy of the Wijk aan Zee organizers usually works well, but in Shamkir there didn't seem to be anything special about the field of participants. A closer look, however, showed renowned fighters like Mamedyarov and Eljanov taking part. Kramnik belongs to the same category. In the last few years, he has developed from a super-strategist to a player brimming with all kinds of interesting ideas and prepared to take risks.

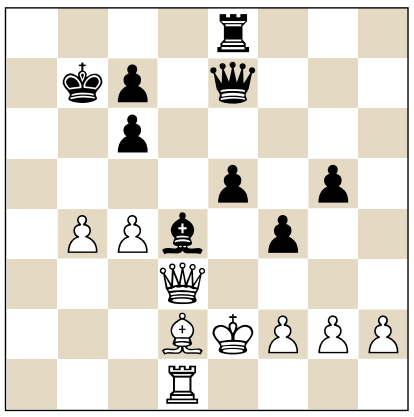
As always the Gashimov Memorial was excellently organized. They have a good website and a lively commentator in the person of Ljubomir Ljubojevic. His interviews with the players after the rounds were very much worth viewing.

The first round immediately produced a major surprise: Wesley So, who had gone undefeated for 67 classical games, went down against Mamedyarov.



So-Mamedyarov
Shamkir 2017 (1)
position after 27...♕e7

White has achieved little enough and should now have gone for a queen swap. **28.♕g3** A strange decision, considering that the black king is safer than its white counterpart. **28...g5 29.♗c3 ♗c5** The most active move. By avoiding the bishop swap Black announces his intention to go for the win. **30.♗d2 f4 31.♕h3+ ♔b7 32.b4 ♗d4 33.♕d3**



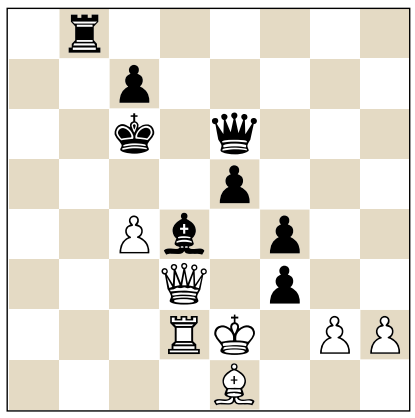
33...♖d8 Stronger was 33...♕d7!, intending 34.f3 g4. White is in trouble.

ETERI KUBLASHVILI

A key clash in the first round. In his encounter with Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, Wesley So saw an unbeaten streak come to an end after 67 games when he blundered in time-trouble.

34.b5 ♕e6 35.bxc6+ ♔xc6 36.f3 ♖b8 37.♗e1 Here, 37.♔f1, intending to take the king to safety first, would have been more accurate, since this would have equalized. Now the initiative reverts to Black again.

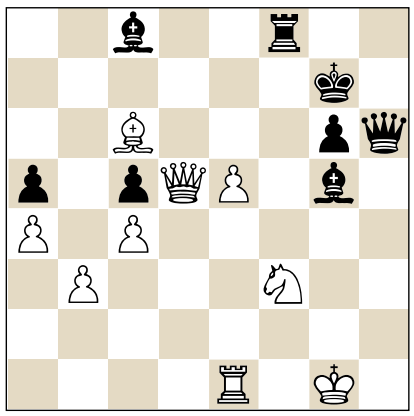
37...g4 38.♖d2 gxf3+



39.♕xf3+?? An atrocious blunder that loses on the spot. He should have captured with the pawn. **39...e4** And, disillusioned, White resigned.

Afterwards, So let it be known that he had had problems adjusting to the time-control. In Shamkir, the old format was used: 40 moves in two hours, followed by 20 moves an hour. The players did not get 30-second increments until after move 60.

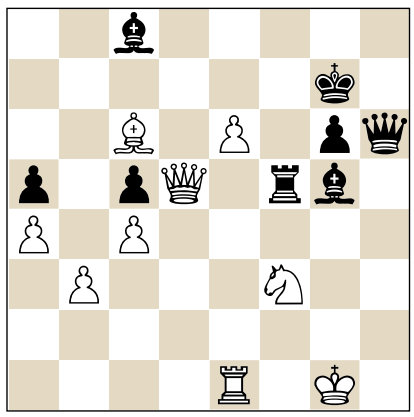
Looking at the final standings, you might say that the decisive game for final victory had already taken place in Round 1. But you could say the same about Mamedyarov's other two wins! In Round 3, he was Black against Eljanov, who had won his first two games.



Eljanov-Mamedyarov
Shamkir 2017 (3)
position after 42...♔g7

During the time-trouble phase, Eljanov had built up a large advantage, but he has a slight problem: his king lacks pawn protection.

43.e6 ♖f5 Vintage Mamedyarov. Utterly fearless, he goes for a hypersharp continuation that could have led to a forced loss. But the win for White was far from easy to see. Objectively, the passive 43...♗e7 would have been Black's best defence, but then White would have made substantial progress with 44.♕e5+ ♔g8 45.♕c7.

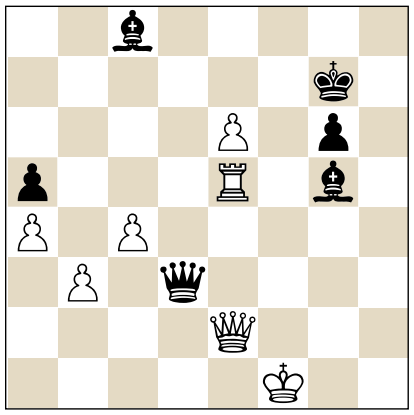


44.♖e5 Winning was 44.e7!. On *Chess.com*, Sam Copeland has this to say about it: 'It's difficult to say what Eljanov had missed, but this wins

fairly easily'. Yes, easy to see when you have a computer helping you. Over the board, it was anything but obvious that Black would be finished after 44...♗e3+ 45.♔f1 ♕h3+ 46.♔e2 ♖xd5 47.e8♕. In many variations, the white king seems to remain exposed.

44...♕h3! Now the position is objectively equal, but in practice it is easier to play for Black.

45.♕xc5 ♕g3+ 46.♔f1 ♖xf3+ 47.♗xf3 ♕xf3+ 48.♕f2 ♕d1+ 49.♕e1 ♕d3+ 50.♕e2

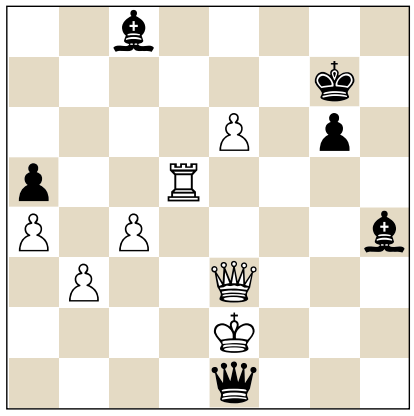


50...♕g3!

Mamedyarov is playing to win. With 50...♕h3+ he could have forced a draw.

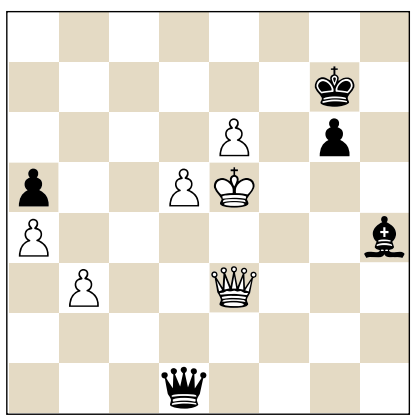
51.♕e4 White should have gone 51.♖xa5, but again, this was not at all easy to see.

51...♕h3+ 52.♕g2 ♕d3+ 53.♕e2 ♕g3 54.♕e4 ♗h4 55.♕e3 ♕h2 56.♖d5 ♕h1+ 57.♔e2 ♕e1+ 58.♔f3 ♕g3+ 59.♔e2 ♕e1+



60.♔d3 Not exactly a winning attempt. Eljanov must have concluded that he would have been in trouble after 60.♔f3 ♗xe6 61.♕e5+ ♔f7. The text only makes things worse.

60...♕d1+ 61.♔e4 ♗b7 62.♔e5 ♗xd5 63.cxd5

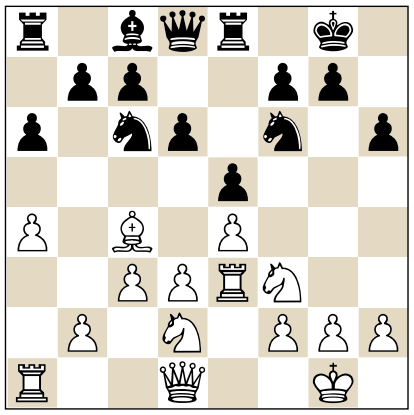


63...♗e7! The death blow. **64.♕a7 ♕e2+ 65.♔f4 g5+ 66.♔g3 ♔f6** White resigned.

For Eljanov, this defeat was a blow that he never managed to overcome, whereas for Mamedyarov it was precisely the boost he needed. It gave him a realistic chance to win the tournament again (last year he finished shared first with Caruana and won the subsequent tiebreak). After solid draws in the next two rounds he faced a new ordeal: Black against Kramnik.

Vladimir Kramnik
Shakhriyar Mamedyarov
Shamkir 2017 (6)
Giuoco Piano

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗c5 4.0-0 ♘f6 5.d3 a6 6.c3 d6 7.♖e1 ♗a7 8.a4 h6 9.♗e3 ♗xe3 10.♖xe3 0-0 11.♘bd2 ♖e8



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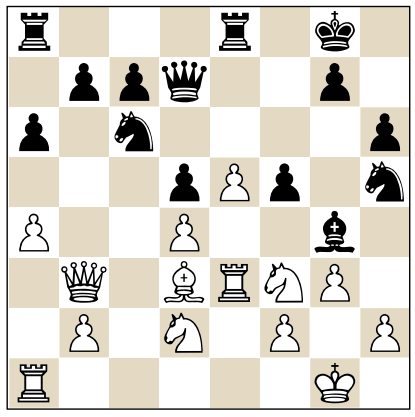
Slightly passive. Alternatives were 11...d5 and 11...♘h5 in order to transfer the knight to d4.

12.d4 Now White has a good chance of creating an opening advantage.

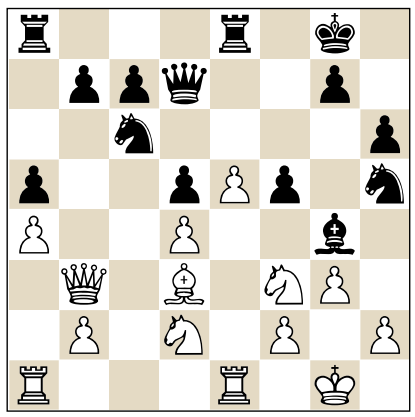
12...exd4 13.cxd4 ♗g4 14.♕b3 ♕d7 15.♗d3 d5 16.e5 ♘h5 17.g3 f5

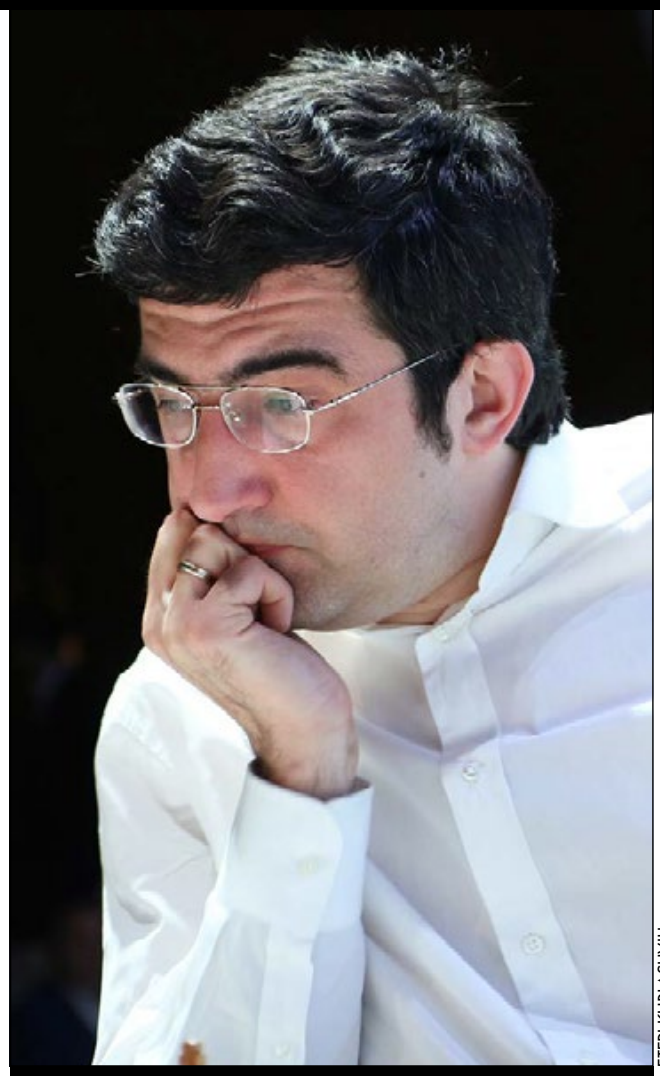
Mamedyarov was dissatisfied with the position and tried to force counterplay. There was no real reason to panic. After 17...g6, intending to play the knight to e6 via g7, White would have been only marginally better.



18.♖ee1 After the game, Ljubojevic and Mamedyarov decided that 18.♖c1 would have yielded White a large advantage. But the text is fine as well. White is anticipating the further advance of the black f-pawn.

18...a5 The young Kasparov had the habit of making random pawn moves when he didn't like his position. Mamedyarov tends to do something similar. Although the text has a purpose – transferring the knight to b4 – it has a serious drawback: he is handing over square b5 to White.





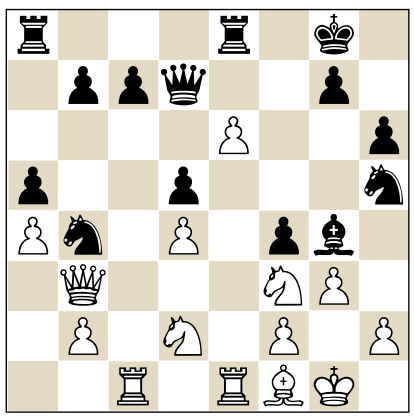
ETERI KUBLASHVILI

Vladimir Kramnik was vulnerable in Shamkir, but his marvellous win against Harikrishna was one for the ages.

19.♖ac1 Kramnik was definitely not having his day. What was more obvious than 19.♗b5 to turn the screws on Black? I believe every strong club player would have gone for this.

19...♘b4 Now Black has freed himself.

20.♗f1 f4 21.e6 An interesting attempt to wrest back the initiative.

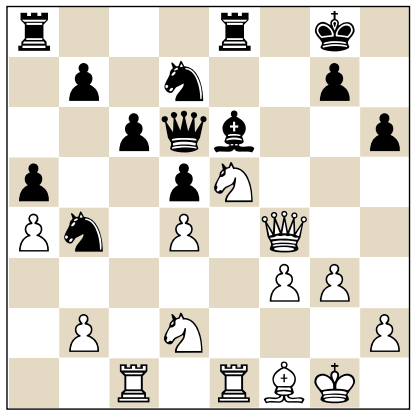


21...♗xe6

Black did not need to take the pawn at once. Interesting was 21...♕e7, intending 22.♘e5 fxg3! 23.♘xg4 gxf2+ 24.♘xf2 ♕g5+, and Black wins back the piece with advantage.

Kramnik had probably planned 23.hxg3 ♗xe6 24.♘d3!, with sufficient compensation for the pawn.

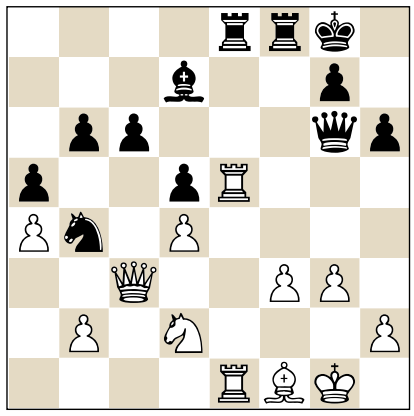
22.♘e5 ♕d6 23.♕f3 ♘f6 24.♕xf4 c6 25.f3 ♘d7



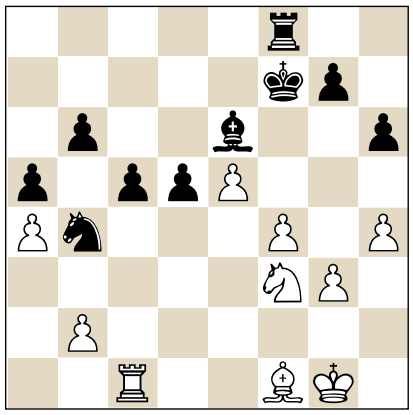
26.♘b3 After the game, Mamedyarov told Ljubojevic that he had been afraid of 26.g4, which vacates square g3 for the white queen. But even then Black would have been fine after 26...♘xe5 27.dxe5 ♕e7 28.♕g3 g5!. White will be unable to form a pawn front on the kingside.

26...♖f8 27.♕e3 ♗f5 28.♕d2 ♘a2 29.♖a1 ♘b4 30.♘xd7 Avoiding the draw! Objectively speaking, he should have gone for move repetition with 30.♖ac1.

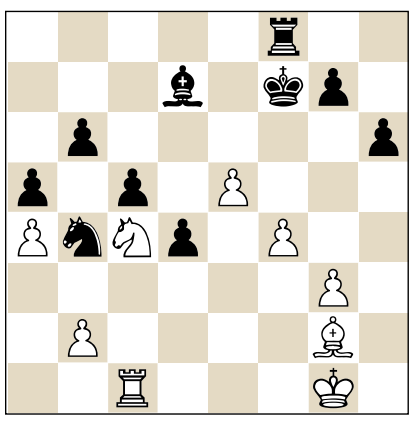
30...♗xd7 31.♕c3 b6 32.♖e5 ♖ae8 33.♖ae1 ♕g6 34.♘d2



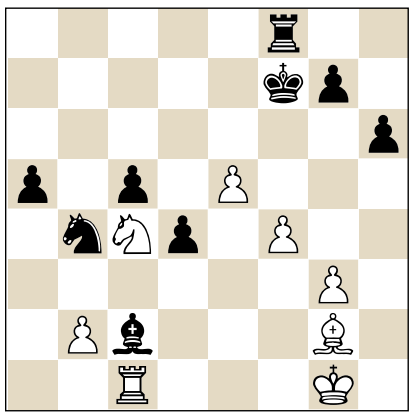
34...♕c2! Mamedyarov is playing very strongly here. By offering a queen swap he pulls up White's initiative short. White is not yet forced to swap the queens, but at some point he will be, because Black will threaten to take the a-pawn. **35.f4 ♖xe5 36.dxe5 ♗e6 37.♕xc2 ♘xc2 38.♖c1 ♘b4 39.♘f3 c5 40.h4 ♔f7**



41.h5 By the looks of it, this is another attempt to wrest back the initiative, but this pawn sac doesn't yield anything. White should have stuck to defending himself with 41.♔f2. Black is better because of his queenside majority, but White should be able to hold. **41...♗g4 42.♘h4 ♗xh5 43.♘f5 ♗g4 44.♘e3 ♗d7 45.♗g2 d4 46.♘c4**



46...♗xa4 The most direct way. 46...♖b8 would also have been fine.
47.♘xb6 ♗c2 48.♘c4

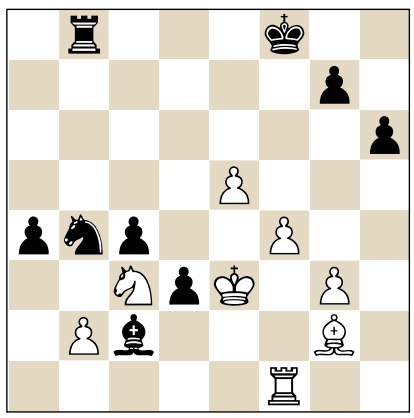


48...d3 This advance is premature, since it reduces the bishop's elbow-room. Correct was 48...a4, with a winning advantage.
49.♘d2 a4 50.♔f2 c4 51.♔e3 ♖c8 52.♘e4 ♔f8 53.♘c3 ♖b8

Radek Wojtaszek came well prepared against Mamedyarov, inflicting the tournament winner's only defeat.

ETERI KUBLASHVILI

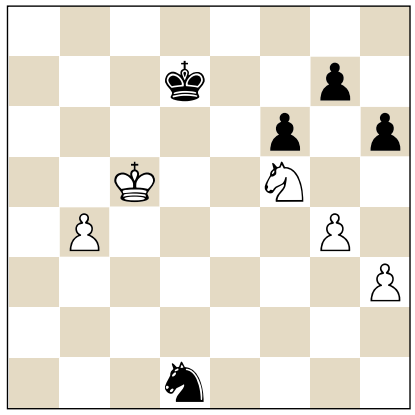
54.♖f1 Now Black will be able to regroup his knight with decisive effect. Stronger was 54.♖a1, as indicated by Ljubojevic. Passive defending would have given White good drawing chances.



54...♘a6! Winning the b-pawn, while White will get insufficient counterplay on the kingside. **55.f5 ♖xb2 56.f6 ♘c7 57.♗h3 d2 58.♗g4 a3 59.e6 gxf6 60.♖xf6+ ♔g8 61.e7 a2 62.♖a6 d1♕ 63.♘xd1 ♗xd1 64.♖a8+ ♔g7 65.♗xd1 ♖b1 66.♖xa2 ♖xd1 67.♖a7 ♘e8 68.♖a4 ♖d3+ 69.♔f4 c3** White resigned.

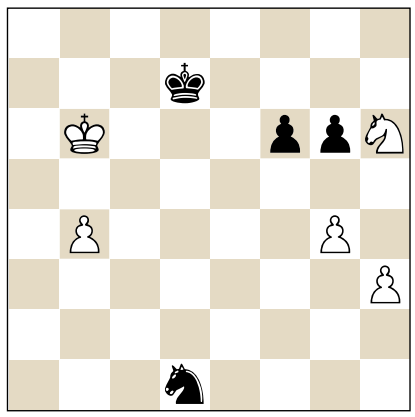
In this game, we saw Mamedyarov in his element. Although he is not afraid of sharp combinations, as against Eljanov, he is also excellent in systematically implementing a strategic plan. After his opening had backfired he played great chess, not counting the inaccuracy on move 48.

It was in this same round that So staked his claim to a top finish by beating Karjakin. It was not a perfectly streamlined win, though, because in the technical phase he made a curious error that he was not punished for.



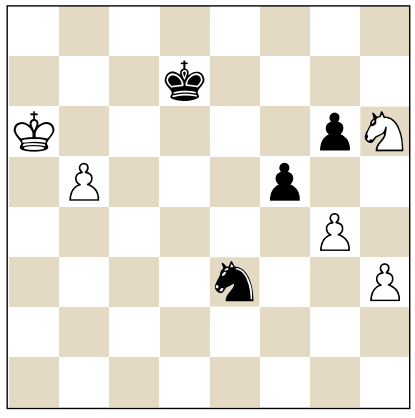
So-Karjakin
Shamkir 2017 (6)
position after 47...♘d1

The knight ending is easily winning for White after the simple 48.♘xg7 ♘f2 49.♘h5 ♘xh3 50.♘xf6+ ♔c7 51.♘g8, and White remains two pawns to the good. Instead, So played **48.♔b6?** This was apparently meant to keep the black king away and queen the b-pawn. But this plan is too elaborate.
48...g6 49.♘xh6



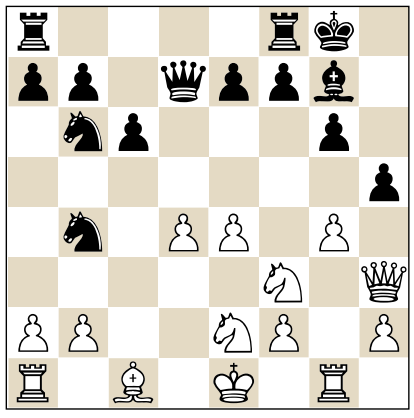
49...♘e3?
Karjakin was definitely not in great form in Shamkir. He should have switched the king and knight moves: after 49...♔e6 50.b5 f5 51.♔c6 ♘b2

Black will hold by sacrificing his knight for the b-pawn.
50.b5 f5 51.♔a6! Now White's plan will just about work.



51...fxg4 52.hxg4 ♘d5 53.b6 ♔c6 54.b7 ♘c7+ 55.♔a7 ♘b5+ 56.♔a8 ♘c7+ 57.♔b8 ♘b5 58.♔a8 ♘c7+ 59.♔b8 ♘b5 60.♘f7 ♔b6 61.g5 ♔a6 62.♘d8 ♔b6 63.♔c8 ♘d6+ 64.♔d7
Black resigned.

In de penultimate round, Mamedyarov surprisingly bit the dust against Wojtaszek. As Black, he would probably have been better advised to go for a solid opening, but he went for a sharp and dangerous line. I will not go into the problems of this opening, but just zoom in on the critical position.



Wojtaszek-Mamedyarov
Shamkir 2017 (8)
position after 15...♕d7

Afterwards, Mamedyarov said that he had gone for this position, because 'someone' had assured him that it was good for Black. He did not name his bad advisor, but anyway, Wojtaszek quickly played:
16.♕h4
An unpinning move he had prepared together with Gajewski. Mamedyarov now thought for almost an hour, concluding that Black was lost. There still followed
16...♘c2+ 17.♔f1 ♘xd4 18.♘exd4 ♗xd4 19.gxh5 ♗f6 20.♗g5 ♗xb2 21.♖e1 ♕d3+ 22.♔g2 f6 23.♗h6 g5 24.♘xg5 ♖f7 25.♘xf7 ♔xf7 26.♖e3 ♕c2 27.♖g3 ♗d4 28.♖g7+ ♔e6 29.♕g4+ ♔d6 30.♗e3 ♗xe3 31.♕g3+ 1-0

There are several reasons why it is strange that Mamedyarov risked stirring this hornets' nest. The move 16.♕h4 had already been played successfully in Lupulescu-Nedilko, in 2013. Also, White's attacking set-up is looking very threatening. Before the computer era, no black player would have even considered going for this: far too dangerous! That danger, so obvious to the human eye, remains hidden from the computer for a long time. It's only when you let a strong program assess the position thoroughly and patiently, that it will grudgingly admit that it is not playable for Black.

Mamedyarov's defeat meant that both So and Topalov were trailing him by just half a point going into the final round. However, both Mamedyarov-Topalov and Harikrishna-So ended peacefully, allowing Mamedyarov to claim the tournament without the need for a tiebreak, albeit with half a point less than last year. This victory propelled him into the Top-10, in which, after his excellent showings in the Russian team championship and the Moscow Grand Prix, he rose to fifth place, with a perfect 2800 rating. At 32 years of age, he must be regarded as a serious candidate in the

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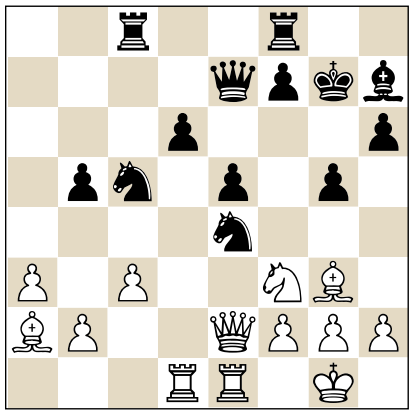
current World Championship cycle. The same goes for Aronian, who is two years older and convincingly won the Grenke Classic.

Mamedyarov justifiedly won the Shamkir event, but the most terrific concept in the tournament came from Kramnik.

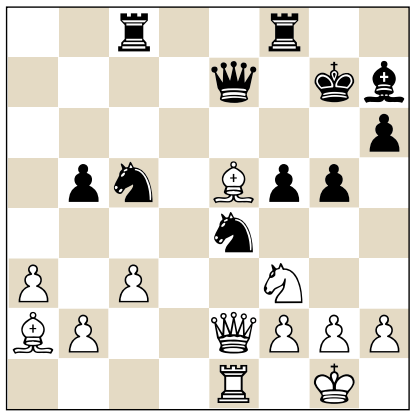


Kramnik-Harikrishna
Shamkir 2017 (4)
position after 23...♘fe4

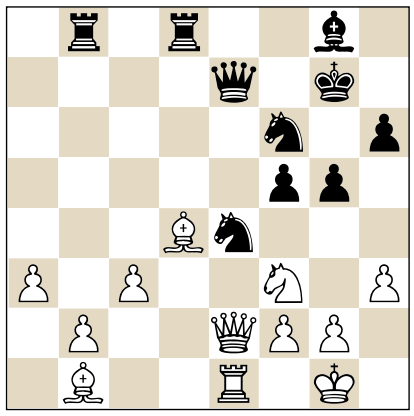
White has reasons to worry, since his queen's bishop is chewing on granite. The computer, therefore, indicates 24.h3 as White's best move, but it would be with a heavy heart that anyone would go for this. Kramnik comes up with a brilliant solution to the problem.

24.♖d5! Preparing for a long-term rook sacrifice. **24...f5 25.♖xe5!** This was the idea of the previous move. Kramnik must have realized that, objectively speaking, the rook sac was not particularly good. In a practical game, however, Black is facing an uphill struggle.

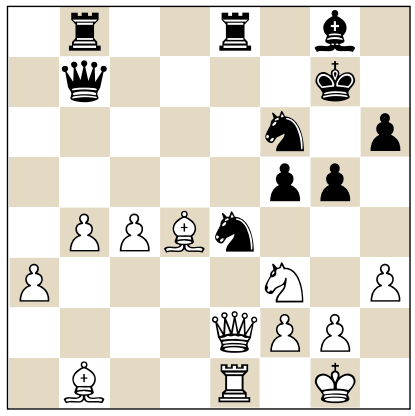
25...dxe5 26.♗xe5+



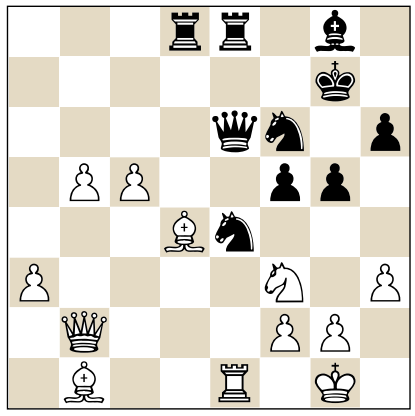
26...♘f6 The first difficult choice for Black. 26...♔g6 would probably have been stronger. After 27.♗d4 ♗g8! 28.♗b1 ♗c4 Black will have saved his b-pawn, but he will have to continue to play accurately if he wants to hang on to his advantage.
27.♕xb5 Now White has at least a third pawn for the rook.
27...♘ce4 28.♗d4 ♖fd8 29.h3 ♖b8 30.♕e2 ♗g8 31.♗b1



31...♕b7 An interesting alternative was 31...♖b3, to stop the advance of the white b-pawn.
32.b4 White sets his pawn front rolling. **32...♖e8 33.c4**



33...♕c6 A careless move, after which White is better. Correct was 33...♕a6 in order to attack the a-pawn. After 34.♕b2 ♗xc4 35.♘e5 ♗b5 Black is objectively still better.
34.♕b2! Now White takes over.
34...♖bd8 35.c5 ♕e6 36.b5



36...♔f8
The decisive error, leading to a quick demise for Black. 36...♕b3 was called for to relieve the pressure. After 37.♕a1 ♔g6 White has a *petite combinaison* that will net him a fourth pawn for the rook: 38.♗xf6 ♘xf6 39.♖xe8 ♖xe8 40.♗xf5+!, with advantage for White.
37.c6

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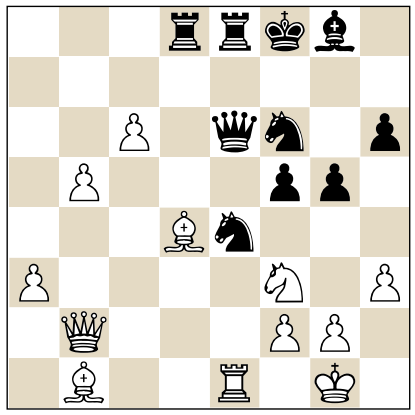
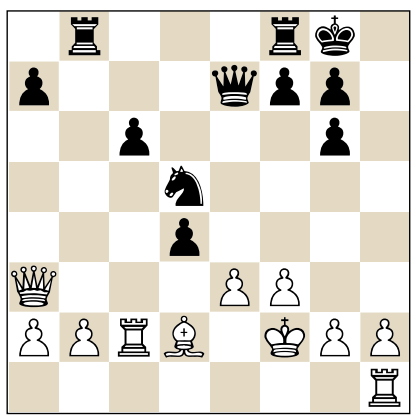


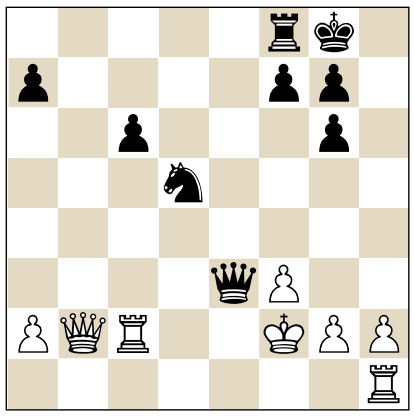
The pawns are advancing mercilessly. Black is powerless.
37...g4 38.hxg4 fxg4 39.♗xe4 gxf3 40.♗xf6 ♖d6 41.♗g7+ ♔f7 42.♗e5 Black resigned.

Earlier in the tournament there had been another explosive rook capture.

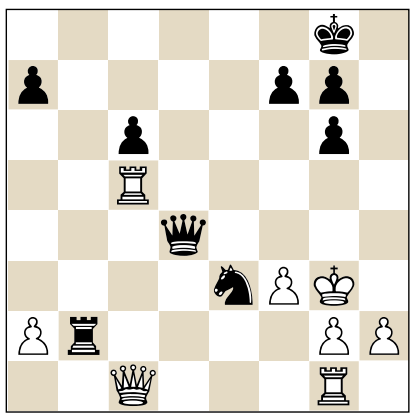


Wojtaszek-Topalov
Shamkir 2017 (2)
position after 22.♕a3

Black clearly has a good position, but how is he to break through the white defences?
22...♖xb2!
The rigorous solution. White will never get around to swapping the queens.
23.♕xb2 dxe3+ 24.♗xe3 ♕xe3+

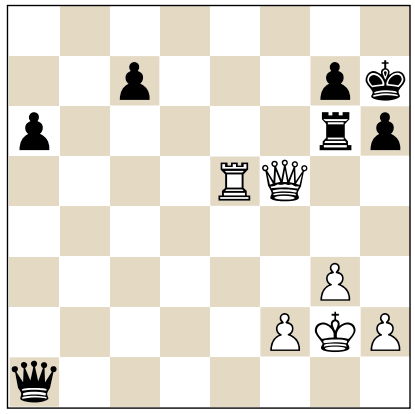


25.♔g3? Allowing Black to deploy his rook with tempo. White's only chance was 25.♔f1.
25...♕f4+ 26.♔f2 ♖b8 Winning.
27.♕c1 ♕d4+ 28.♔g3 ♘e3 29.♖c5 ♖b2 30.♖g1



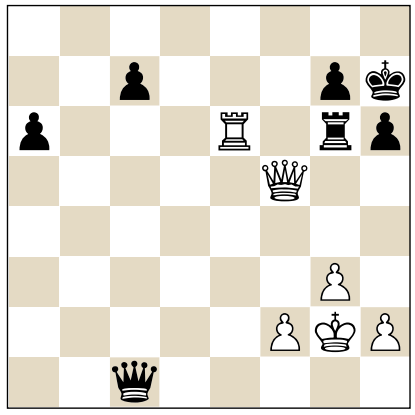
30...♖xa2 Topalov is taking his time. With 30...♖c2! (31.♖xc2 ♘f5+ mates) he could have decided the issue in elegant fashion. **31.h3 ♕d6+ 32.f4 ♕d3 33.♔h2 ♕e4 34.♖g5 ♖c2** White resigned.

The older guard did reasonably well in Shamkir, with both Kramnik and Topalov making plus scores. Adams would have done so, too, if he had been more alert in the following fragment.



Adams-Eljanov
Shamkir 2017 (4)
position after 34.♔g2

Black is in a difficult bind, despite his extra pawn. It will not be easy to unpin his rook. The only defence was the none-too-obvious 34...♕a4!, the idea being to introduce the possibility of a check on c6 and threaten 35...♕g4. Eljanov played **34...♕c1** with more or less the same idea. But the situation is different, because here, with 35.♖e6! Adams could have set up a deadly pin.



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

Black is powerless, e.g. 35...♕g5 36.♕d3! (not 36.♕e4 in view of 36...♕g4) 36...c5 37.♖xa6 c4 38.♕e4 h5 39.h3! ♔h6 40.♖a8 ♔h7 41.♖c8, and the effect of the pin continues unabated.
But now, after **35.h4 ♕c6+ 36.♔g1 ♕f6** Black had consolidated. **37.♕e4 ♕c6 38.♕d3 ♔h8 39.♕d8+ ♔h7 40.♕d3 ♔h8 41.♕d8+ ♔h7 42.♕d3**
Draw. ■

Shamkir 2017 — **cat. XXI**

					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		TPR
1	Shakhriyar Mamedyarov	IGM	AZE	2772	*	1	½	1	0	½	½	½	½	1	5½	2841
2	Wesley So	IGM	PHI	2822	0	*	½	1	½	½	1	½	½	½	5	2792
3	Veselin Topalov	IGM	BUL	2741	½	½	*	½	1	½	0	½	½	1	5	2801
4	Vladimir Kramnik	IGM	RUS	2811	0	0	½	*	½	1	½	½	1	1	5	2793
5	Radoslaw Wojtaszek	IGM	POL	2745	1	½	0	½	*	½	½	½	½	½	4½	2767
6	Michael Adams	IGM	ENG	2761	½	½	½	0	½	*	1	½	½	½	4½	2766
7	Sergey Karjakin	IGM	RUS	2783	½	0	1	½	½	0	*	½	½	1	4½	2763
8	Teimour Radjabov	IGM	AZE	2710	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	*	½	0	4	2738
9	Pentala Harikrishna	IGM	IND	2755	½	½	½	0	½	½	½	½	*	0	3½	2689
10	Pavel Eljanov	IGM	UKR	2751	0	½	0	0	½	½	0	1	1	*	3½	2690

The unsettling effect of copying the adversary's style in World Championship matches

Play like your opponent

It is tempting and fascinating to search for the exact moment when a world title match was essentially decided. **MIHAIL MARIN** found that in more than one match for the crown holding up a mirror to the opponent had a devastating impact.

Ever since the times of great and influential commentators like Steinitz, Tarrasch or Alekhine, a key element in game comments has been identifying the decisive mistake of the loser of the game. For these distinguished scribes this was often an excellent opportunity for explaining the inner essence of the game and making their comments didactic and instructive.

Similar decisive moments, but on a larger scale, have occurred in most World Championship matches. Moments that tipped the scales or decisively turned the tables. But to my knowledge these moments have enjoyed far less attention from the commentators. And I am, obviously, not speaking about the moment that one player took such a commanding lead that, practically speaking, the situation became hopeless for his opponent.

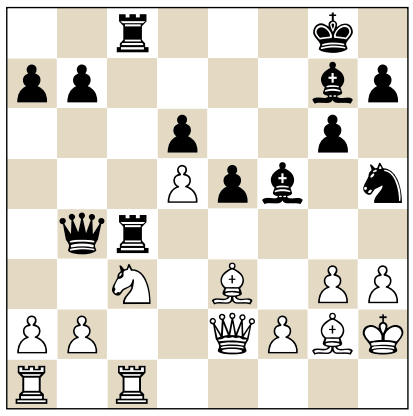
What fascinates me is to pinpoint the game in which, for one reason or another, the other player acquiesced to his inner conviction that he was the underdog, at least psychologically. This would explain all the mistakes that had led to the insurmountable disadvantage on the score table.

These were more or less my thoughts after reading Tal's comment that the decisive game in his first match against Botvinnik was Game 11. This win gave Tal a two-point lead, which would not by itself have been enough to ensure victory, but Tal was thinking of a subtle psychological aspect to the match.

To understand this, we must make a brief summary of the games leading up to this point. Contrary to his habit of losing the first game in strong tournaments and matches, Tal won his first match game (interestingly enough, this was the first game ever between these two players), and after another six games he was well ahead. The scenario is well described by what happened during the decisive phase of Game 6:

Mikhail Tal watches Mikhail Botvinnik as 'the Patriarch' ponders his 18th move in Game 4 of their 1960 World Championship match in Moscow. The Latvian genius had won the first game and would eventually claim the match 12½-8½ (+6, -2, =13).

Mikhail Botvinnik
Mikhail Tal
Moscow Wch match 1960 (6)



position after 21.♖a1

In view of the threat g3-g4, seemingly forcing the retreat of one of the black minor pieces, White has every right to claim a slight advantage, based on his control of the e4-square. But Tal had designed one of his trademark bolts out of the blue:

21...♘f4!? 22.gxf4 exf4 23.♗d2?!

This must have been the move Tal had counted on, and now Black has sufficient compensation for the piece. Of course, 23.♗xa7? ♕a5 retrieves the bishop with an obvious positional advantage, but as the commentators discovered soon after the game (later confirmed by modern engines), White could have prepared ♗xa7 with 23.a3!. This position has been thoroughly analysed over the decades, so I will just point out a few aspects: 23...♕b3 (Black's only chance for at least some compensation is keeping the b2-pawn under attack. If 23...♕a5 then 24.♗d2, and White is simply a piece up) 24.♗xa7! Now is a good moment for pawn grabbing. 24...♖a8 (or if 24...b6 then 25.a4, preparing to free the bishop with a4-a5. Due to his hanging c4-rook, Black cannot trap the bishop with 25...♖a8 26.♖a3 ♕b4 27.♘a2. With the rook still on c8, he could have played ...♕xb2, with counterplay, but here this would be hopeless) 25.♘b5! Once again, the hanging c4-rook allows White to save his bishop.

But for a classical player like

Botvinnik, facing a young tactical genius, taking the a7-pawn must have seemed unsafe. A mutual exchange of inaccuracies followed and Tal eventually won.

To many, the +3 on the score table must have looked decisive. Even worse for Botvinnik, he seemed unable to slow down his opponent's attacking impetus. In order to have chances in the match, the World Champion needed to pull himself together and find a way to either sidestep irrational positions or deal with them better.

Botvinnik did this, winning the next two games and reducing his disadvantage to one point. Now it was Tal's turn to come up with a new element in order to return to his winning ways. After a draw in Game 10 Tal managed to do this in what must have been a most painful game for Botvinnik from a psychological point of view. More specifically, the challenger defeated the Champion with his own weapons, namely positional play!

Mikhail Tal
Mikhail Botvinnik
Moscow Wch match 1960 (11)
Neo-Grünfeld

1.♘f3!?

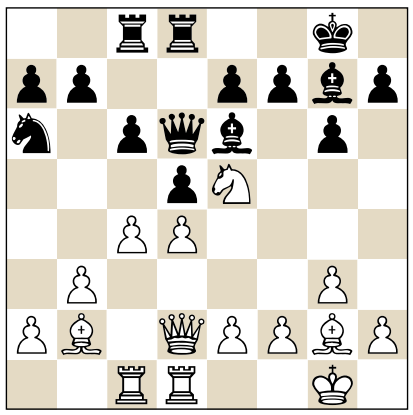
In the previous games, Tal had invariably opened with 1.e4 but had failed to prove a convincing way against Botvinnik's Caro-Kann. His opponent must have regarded this opening as a concession, since Botvinnik was supposed to be the strategic expert.

1...♘f6 2.g3 g6 3.♗g2 ♗g7 4.0-0 0-0 5.c4 c6 6.b3 ♘e4 7.d4 d5 8.♗b2 ♗e6 9.♘bd2 ♘xd2 10.♕xd2 ♘a6

Pawn grabbing is not only objectively questionable, but also completely wrong, since after 10...dxc4 11.♘g5 cxb3 12.♘xe6 fxe6 White's better development and Black's kingside weaknesses offer White an overwhelming initiative.

'To many, the +3 on the score table must have looked decisive. Even worse for Botvinnik, he seemed unable to slow down his opponent's attacking impetus.'

11.♖ac1 ♕d6 12.♘e5 ♖fd8 13.♖fd1 ♖ac8

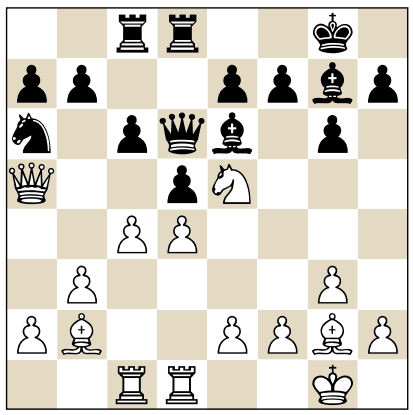


Both sides have completed their development and it is up to White to prove that his slight space advantage is worth something. Even though Black's position is quite passive, Botvinnik must have relied on the fact that Tal would go for premature activity and worsen his position.

14.♕a5!! In a higher sense, I would call this the decisive move in the match. If Botvinnik was thinking along the above lines, he was not totally wrong. In his comments, Tal writes that at first he had mainly considered 14.c5, an active move but also a positional concession, releasing the central tension and allowing him to prepare central counterplay with 14...♕b8 15.b4 f6 16.♘d3 ♗f5, followed by ...e7-e5.

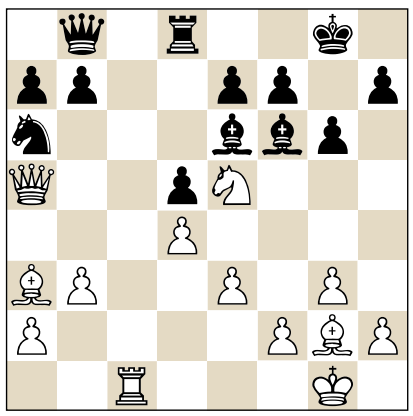
Even though Tal justifies his last move with a few typical sparkling lines, it is likely that he had used what Botvinnik later called 'Petrosian's algorithm' to find it. Concretely, this means determining which piece needs a better position and act accordingly!

Indeed, all White's pieces were optimally placed after 13 moves, with the exception of the queen, which could do better. And the last move also prepares for activating the bishop with the concrete tactical threat of 15.♗a3 ♕c7 16.♘xc6!!, e.g. 16...bxc6 17.♕xa6 or 16...♕xc6 17.cxd5.



14...dxc4 Botvinnik reacts to this Petrosian move in... Tal style, giving up the centre with the aim of getting dynamic play. Objectively, this is the best move, even though it fails to equalize.

14...♕b4 would not have prevented the threatened combination: 15.♘xc6! (White would also retain a small plus with 15.♗c3 ♕xa5 16.♗xa5 b6 17.cxd5 cxd5 18.♘c6) 15...bxc6 16.♕xa6 dxc4 17.♗a3 ♕b6 18.♕xb6 axb6 19.bxc4. White is a pawn up and Black's pawns (e7 and c6) are hanging as much as White's. 14...♕b8 is the only reasonable alternative that doesn't drop a pawn, but it leaves Black in a passive position: 15.cxd5!? cxd5 16.♗a3 ♗f6 17.♖xc8 ♕xc8 18.♖c1 ♕b8 19.e3,



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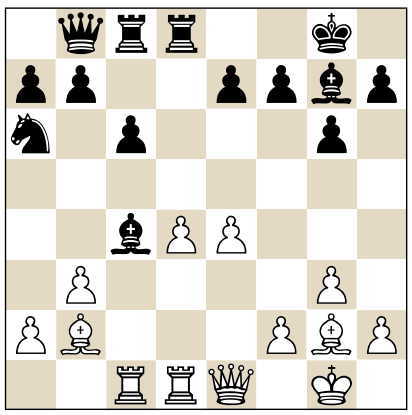
followed by ♗f1. All White's pieces are more active than Black's.

15.♘xc4 ♕c7

Botvinnik's second move after this slight shock is not the best one. Of course, exchanging queens would make Black's play easier, but the most effective way to offer it was 15...♕b4!, very much in Tal's style, as after 16.♕g5 Black is teetering on the precipice due to his exposed queen. But he is absolutely fine after 16...♖d7 17.♗a3 ♗f6 18.♕e3 ♕b5. White would do better with 17.e4, keeping a small plus due to his strong centre, but his own queen would be slightly misplaced and its counterpart would exert some slight pressure on the queenside and in the centre.

16.♕e1!? An active move, preventing any tricks around d4. White will have time to activate his queen later.

16...♕b8 17.e4 ♗xc4



18.♖xc4! A last finesse to consolidate White's advantage.

After 18.bxc4, 18...c5 19.e5 cxd4 20.♗xd4 b6 would equalize.

In the next phase, Tal activated his bishops with ♗c1-f4 and ♗h3 and later started a positional attack with h2-h4-h5. Only after reaching a practically winning position did he use some small fireworks, but all in all this was a fine positional win.

This must have badly shaken Botvinnik's confidence in his chances of retaining the title. In the earlier stages, he could rely on his strategic superiority as long as he managed to avoid messy positions, but after this game it seemed as if Tal could outplay him positionally as well.

In the second half of the match Tal increased his advantage to +4, which was also the final result of the match.

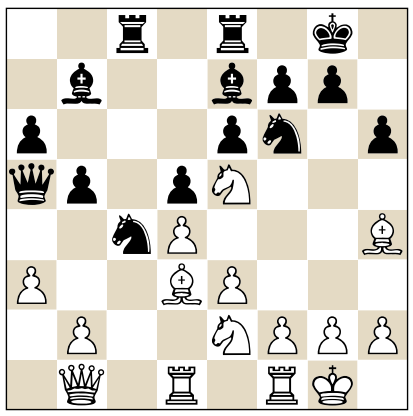
The chess machine stalls

Following the model of the first Botvinnik-Tal match, we can identify similar moments in other historic battles.

In 1927, Capablanca, the chess machine, as he was called because of his impeccable technique, accepted the challenge of the slightly younger combinational genius Alekhine. The match started with a cold shower for Capablanca, who blundered a small combination in Game 1, giving Alekhine an extra pawn and eventually the win. The Cuban fought back with two wins, which seemed to put him back on the right track. But Alekhine levelled the score in the enormously complicated 11th game.

'In 1927, Capablanca, the chess machine, accepted the challenge of the combinational genius Alekhine.'

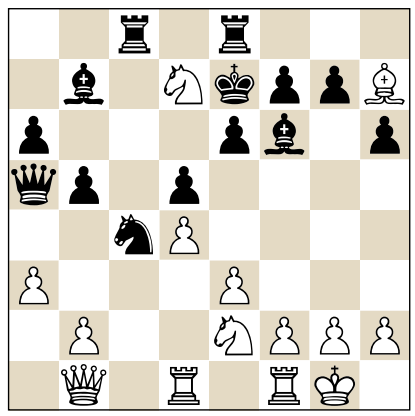
Game 12, from which we are going to examine the essential fragment, turned out to be crucial, not only because it gave Alekhine back the lead, but also because of some intriguing psychological considerations.



Alekhine-Capablanca
Buenos Aires Wch match 1927 (12)
position after 17...♘c4

Both sides are well mobilized and Black's queenside counterplay seems to compensate for White's kingside pressure. But Alekhine spotted a small detail: the d7-square is undefended.

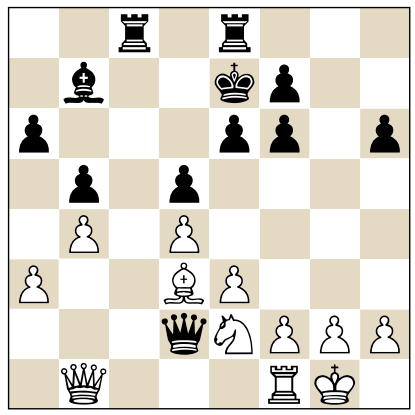
18.♗xf6! ♗xf6 19.♗h7+ ♔f8 20.♘d7+ ♔e7



21.♘c5?

Alekhine tries to play in Capablanca's style. The c5-square is chronically weak and the knight on c4 is not stable, since after over-defending a3, White could play b2-b3. But the last move is a double blunder. It not only allows Black a tactical solution, but also overlooks a hidden resource for White in the following line:

21.♘xf6 gxf6! was unanimously considered better for Black due to the double threat of ...f6-f5, trapping the bishop and ...♘d2, forking White's major pieces. But 22.♗d3! is, in fact, very strong. After the exchange of the f6-bishop the c5-square is even weaker, while the kingside structure is shattered. The tactical point is that 22...♘d2 23.♖xd2 ♕xd2 runs into an unexpected resource: 24.b4!!.



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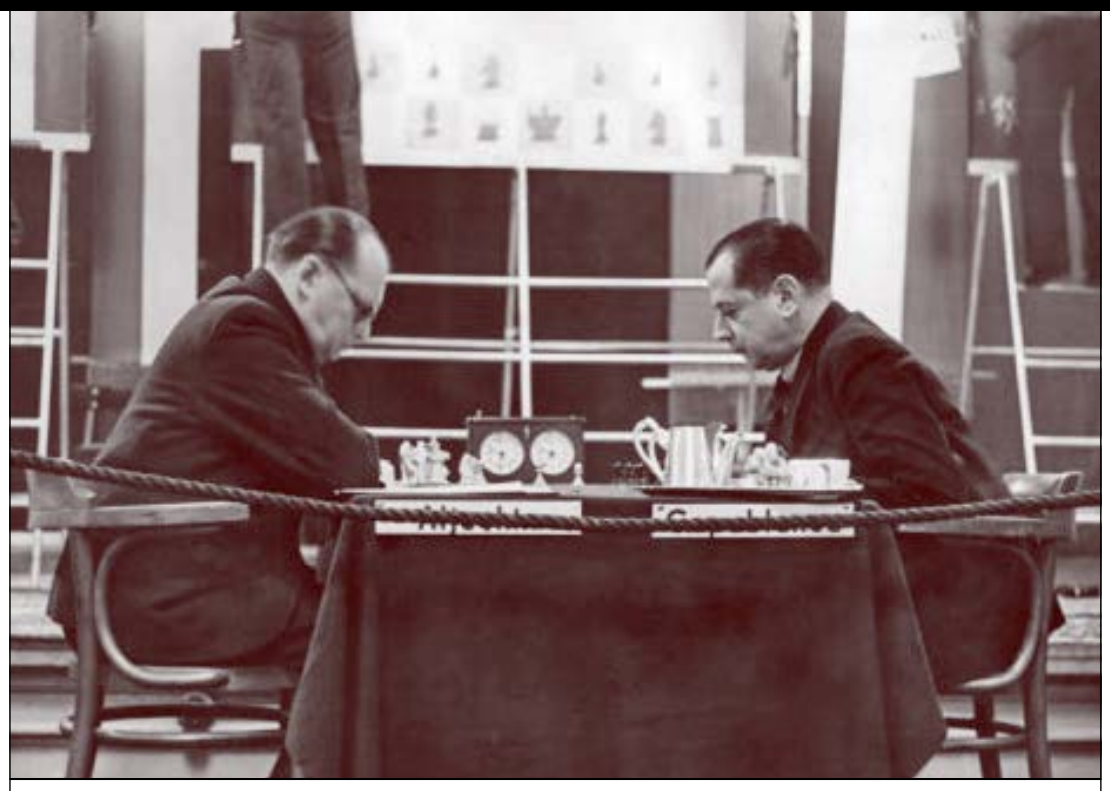
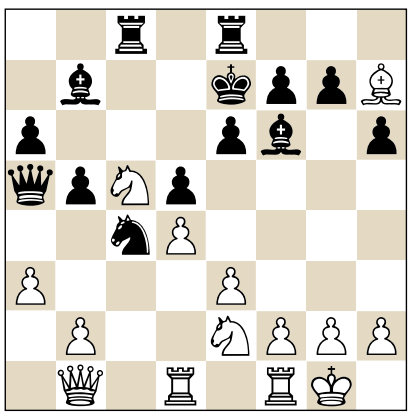
Suddenly the queen is trapped. The only way to fight against the threat



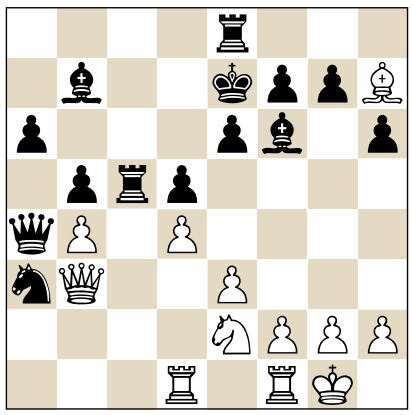
Much to the Cuban's frustration, Alekhine and Capablanca only played three more games after their match in 1927. 'Capa' won in Nottingham 1936. Alekhine won their last game (photo) at the AVRO tournament in 1938.

of ♖d1 is 24...♖c3 25.♘xc3! (much stronger than 25.♖d1 ♖xd3. Playing with a queen against two rooks would be dangerous for White, while 26.♕xd3 ♕xd3 27.♖xd3 ♖c8 offers him 'only' a better endgame) 25...♕xc3 26.♖c1 ♕d2 (26...♕xa3 27.♖c7+ wins the bishop. With the queen on d2 this would be ineffective due to ...♖c8, with dangerous counterplay) 27.♖c2! ♕xd3 28.♖c7+ ♔d6 29.♕xd3 ♔xc7. Black cannot build a fortress, since 30.♕h7 wins the h6-pawn, followed by the run of White's h-pawn to the other side of the board.



21...♕b6?

A passive move, failing to play in Alekhine style! It is remarkable that even in his later comments Capablanca assumes that 21...♖xc5! only leads to complicated play. But Alekhine is right when he claims an advantage for Black based on the following variations: 22.b4!? (22.dxc5 ♘xb2, followed by ...♘c4, would soon yield Black three pawns for the exchange) 22...♘xa3 23.♕b3 (23.bxa5 ♘xb1 24.dxc5 ♘a3 would lead to a similar material balance as above. Or if 23.♕b2 then 23...♕c7! 24.bxc5 ♕xc5, followed by ...♘c4, would leave White helpless against the advance of the connected queenside pawns) 23...♕a4!.



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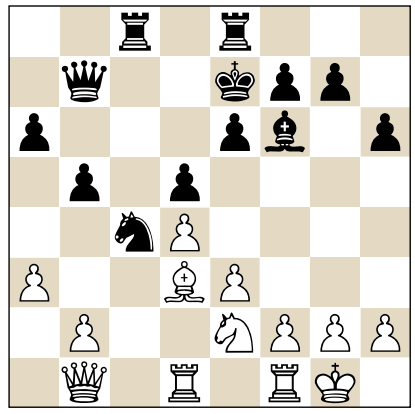
Black needs to keep the a3-knight defended in order to gain a tempo for trapping the bishop with ...g7-g6: 24.♕xa4 bxa4 25.bxc5 g6 26.♖a1 ♘c4 27.♖xa4 a5. The last finesse. Black anticipates ♖b1 by preparing to set up a reliable queenside fortress. ...♖h8 will soon yield him a material advantage.

22.♘xb7 ♕xb7 23.♗d3



As pointed out by Alekhine, the position remains more pleasant for Black. This must have been what, together with some undecisiveness, led Capablanca to think better of the promising exchange sacrifice. But the slight initiative based on the active c4-knight proved temporary, while the weakness of the c5-square has a permanent character. In the next phase, Alekhine managed to drive the enemy knight away, obtaining a slightly better position.

Probably still under the impression that he had an advantage, Capablanca tried to invade with the rook via the c-file, but it got trapped.

The rest of the match suggests that after this loss Capablanca lost faith in his chances to defeat Alekhine, despite the equal score. Draws did not count and Alekhine needed six wins to claim the title, so Capablanca adopted an unprecedented strategy. He tried to be as conservative as possible, which resulted in a series of eight consecutive draws, some of them really short for the standards of those days. Kasparov successfully used a similar policy in his first match against Karpov when he found himself one loss away from overall defeat.

According to the commentators of that time, Capablanca also used some psychological tricks, such as demonstratively 'falling asleep' during the game to show how bored he was. This is a bit odd, but similar things have happened in much more recent world title matches as well.

But this strategy only strengthened Alekhine's confidence, and he

managed to break the series of draws in Game 21. That was the beginning of the end, since the match lasted only until Game 34.

Kortchnoi's stunning comeback

The following game, played many decades later, during the most politicized match ever, only came close to being decisive. That it wasn't was not only because the initial situation of one of the players was far too precarious.

The World Championship match between Anatoly Karpov and Viktor Kortchnoi in Baguio in 1978 took place under the same rules as Capablanca-Alekhine: the winner needed six wins. Its course was anything but linear, with several turning moments.

In the beginning, Kortchnoi's opening preparation looked better and he had the initiative in most of the first seven games. But things gradually changed.

In Baguio, his main opening with Black was the open Spanish, somewhat surprisingly, since in their previous match he had mainly played the French. In the first few games, things worked out well for the challenger, but then Karpov's team managed to dismantle Kortchnoi's main line, forcing him to resort to openings that were not part of his main repertoire.

Even more interesting was the character of the middle- and endgame battles. As pointed out by Botvinnik four years earlier, on the occasion of the Candidates' final between the same players, Kortchnoi's strategic arsenal was wider and more interesting than Karpov's, but the latter was simply more accurate move by move throughout the game.

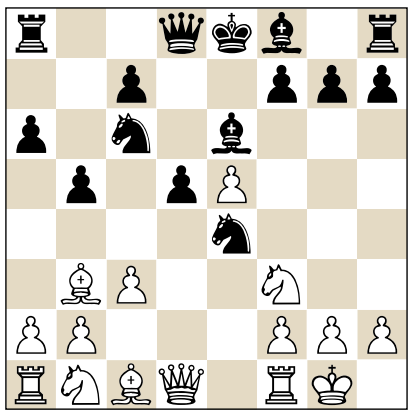
This was obvious in many moments of their second match, too, as for instance in the previous, 27th, game. Kortchnoi outplayed his opponent completely, but in a position with a stable advantage he rushed in by prematurely opening the centre and lost. This game put him on the verge of defeat in the match, as the score became 5-2 to Karpov's favour.

In that difficult moment, Kortchnoi took a very brave decision, adopting a then unpopular variation of the Open Spanish.

Anatoly Karpov
Viktor Kortchnoi
Baguio City Wch match 1978 (28)
Ruy Lopez Open

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♘xe4 6.d4 b5 7.♗b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♗e6 9.c3

In Game 8, Karpov played the then very rare (but now highly topical) 9.♘bd2 ♘c5 10.c3. Caught by surprise, Kortchnoi thought for roughly an hour and replied 10...g6, which led to quick disaster. Four games later he played the main move 10...d4, but then Karpov unleashed the prepared bomb: 11.♘g5, an absolute novelty then. Kortchnoi found himself in a worse endgame, but he managed to hold.



9...♘c5!?

Kortchnoi's main line went 9...♗c5 10.♘bd2 0-0 11.♗c2 ♗f5 12.♘b3 ♗g4, yielding him two easy draws in the first part of the match. But in Game 14, Karpov cast some doubt over this set-up with 13.h3 ♗h5 14.g4 ♗g6 15.♗xe4 dxe4 16.♘xc5 ♕xd1 17.♖xd1 exf3 18.♗f4 and eventually won. In the next match of 1981, Kortchnoi took his revenge, deviating with 12...♗g6, but this is a completely different story...

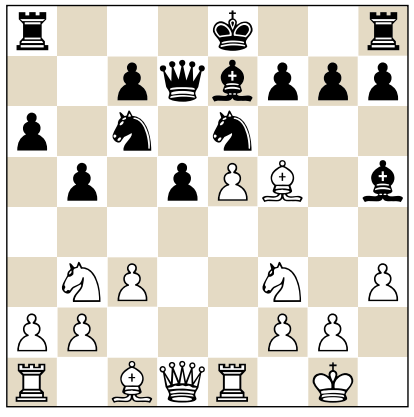
10.♗c2 ♗g4

This variation did not enjoy a good reputation in those days, but soon after this game it became the main line.

11.♖e1 ♗e7 12.♘bd2 ♕d7 13.♘b3

In the 1980s, 13.♘f1 became the fashion, which it still is today. At that time, Kortchnoi became the main advocate of this line.

13...♘e6 14.h3 ♗h5 15.♗f5

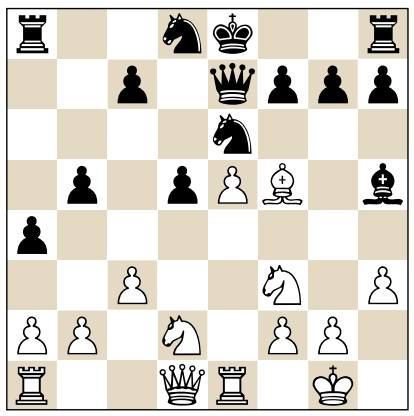


Karpov's play looks logical: White fights for the c5-square. But the next move proves an adequate antidote.

15...♘cd8 Preparing to replace the e6-knight in case of an exchange, maintaining control of c5.

16.♗e3 a5!? Not giving White time to organize his invasion on c5.

17.♗c5 a4 18.♗xe7 ♕xe7 19.♘bd2 Confronted with a slightly unfamiliar structure, Karpov plays too timidly. 19.♘bd4 would have been more active.



19...c6!? A slightly mysterious move in a position in which Black has no problems at all. Kortchnoi obviously did not want to hurry castling and simply consolidates, inviting his opponent to display his cards. This method was fairly typical for Karpov himself, who frequently provoked his

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opponent into making mistakes, but the shoe seemed to be on the other foot, for Kortchnoi used to be more straightforward.

20.b4?! Kortchnoi's waiting move paid off, since Karpov undertakes an uninspired concrete action! It made no sense blocking the c-pawn, which had just displayed its intentions to 'stay low'. In the endgame, the weakness of the c3-pawn will eventually prove decisive.

20...♘g5

After this small queenside success, Kortchnoi switches to the kingside.

21.♕e2 g6 22.♗g4 ♗xg4 23.hxg4 ♘de6 The second knight comes to the blocking square.

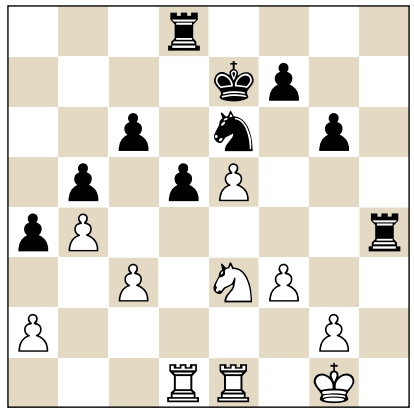
24.♕e3 h5!

Suddenly White experiences some problems along the h-file.

25.♘xg5 ♕xg5 26.♕xg5 ♘xg5 27.gxh5

The seemingly active 27.f4?! ♘e6 28.f5 ♘g7 leaves White's daring pawns hanging.

27...♖xh5 28.♘f1 ♖h4 29.♖ad1 ♔e7 30.f3 ♘e6 31.♘e3 ♖d8



Things have cleared up and Black has a small but persistent advantage. His main positional threat is ...d5-d4 (preferably with a rook on c4), dooming the entire white queenside. In principle, White should hold, but his position is unpleasant. Karpov had won many such almost drawn endings but now he will find himself on the opposite side.

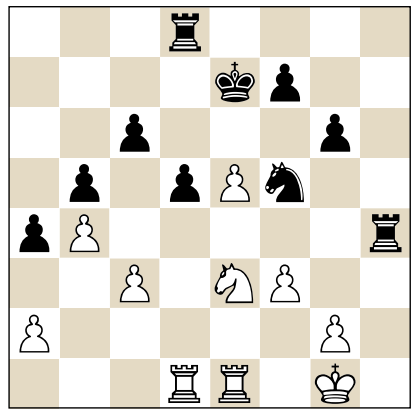
32.♘g4 Cutting the h4-rook's connection with the queenside.

32...♘g5 Possibly planning ...♘e4-g3-f5.

33.♘e3 ♘e6 34.♘g4 ♘g7

Having been prevented from carrying out the tactical manoeuvre ...♘e4-g3-f5, Kortchnoi chooses an alternate route.

35.♘e3 ♘f5



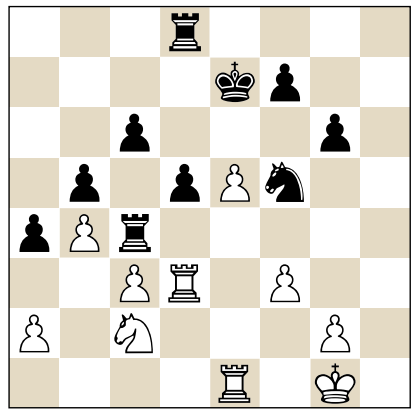
36.♘c2?

The decisive mistake, giving the rook access to c4. The ease with which Karpov collapsed is surprising.

36.♘xf5+ would not have been a satisfactory solution either: 36... gxf5 (threatening ...♖c4 and ...♔e6, with annoying pressure) 37.♖d4 f4 (planning an invasion with ...♖8h8 and ...♖h1+, combined with ...♔e6, of course) 38.g3 ♖g8 39.g4 ♖gh8 40.♖xf4 ♖h1+ 41.♔f2 ♖8h2+ 42.♔g3 ♖xe1 43.♔xh2 ♖xe5, followed by ...♖e2 and ..♖xa2.

The only way to stay in the game was 36.♘g4!, when Black would have had nothing better than 36...♔e6, followed by the regrouping ...♖hh8, ...♖d7, ...♖8d8 and finally ...d5-d4, with chances to annoy White.

36...♖c4 37.♖d3



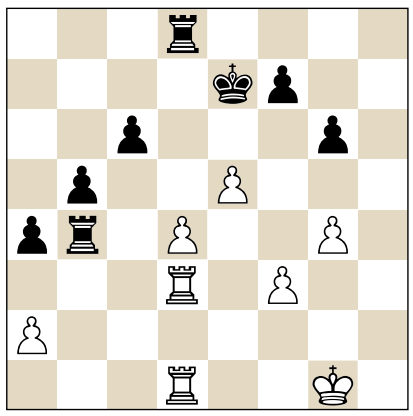
37...d4!

With his flag hanging, Kortchnoi finds the right move order, for after

Baguio 1978. As Anatoly Karpov, FIDE president Max Euwe and Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos listen to 'The Internationale' (erroneously played instead of the Soviet anthem!) at the opening ceremony of the match, Viktor Kortchnoi and Petra Leeuwerik choose to remain seated and enjoy the confusion.

37...♘g7?! White could return to the right path with 38.♘e3 ♖h4 39.♘g4.

38.g4 ♘g7 39.♘xd4 ♘e6 40.♖ed1 ♘xd4 41.cxd4 ♖xb4



Time-trouble was over and the game was adjourned. White's central majority is not dangerous, since the black king is ready to slow it down, whereas Black's majority will soon be unstoppable.

42.♔f2 c5 43.d5

Trying a desperate counterattack. 43.dxc5 ♖xd3 44.♖xd3 ♖b2+ is also hopeless.

43...♖b2+ 44.♔g3 ♖xa2 and Kortchnoi won 17 moves later.

There are several moments in this game when Karpov must have felt outplayed by his own weapons. Moreover, he also proved vulnerable to opening surprises, the same as happened at the start of the match.

Of course, one could argue that by the time this 28th game was played he was tired, but what about Kortchnoi then, who was 20 years older?!

One way or another, this game seems to have affected Karpov so much that he also got gradually strangled in Game 29 and 31, in 79 and 71 moves, respectively. In both games Kortchnoi chose unforcing lines, exploiting Karpov's minor inaccuracies in these long battles.

The chess world was utterly excited. Out of the first 26 games, only six were decided, but now there was only one draw in five consecutive games! Suggestively, Karpov annotated this only draw in his first game collection, leading us to think that he badly needed a break.

The consequences of Game 28th were so far-reaching that Kortchnoi easily retrieved all lost ground. The score was levelled, 5-5, and the outcome seemed completely uncertain... But as said above, Kortchnoi's situation before Game 28 was so critical that this wonderful effort was not enough to win the match. Probably very tired and possibly over-optimistic, he went for an uninspired and uncharacteristic opening, the Schmid Benoni (transposing from the Pirc Defence) in what turned out to be the last game, allowing Karpov to retain his title when everything had seemed to be lost. Or did remembering the way Taimanov and Spassky got punished by the Soviet regime give Karpov new energy for the last game?! This reminds me of a few verses from a song dedicated to the match by the Soviet ballad composer and singer Leonid Sergeev. Imitating Karpov's high-pitched voice infused with fear, Sergeev sang: 'I must, I can, I wish to win, I gave my word in Moscow...'

The games examined above were chosen from some of the most epic battles ever, between players with completely different styles. The connecting thread is the ability of one of the players to defeat his opponent with his own weapons, but also the failure of the other to do the same. I can only dream that there will be times again when such long matches will take place, forcing the contenders to display a much wider arsenal than they are allowed to these days in the medium-sized matches of our times... ■

'Imitating Karpov's high-pitched voice infused with fear, Sergeev sang: 'I must, I can, I wish to win, I gave my word in Moscow...'

Short Stories

The Patriarch

In the late 1980s, I found myself at the opening ceremony of the Verenigde Spaarbank Tournament in Amsterdam, seated at a table with the family of the late Dr. Max Euwe. The delicate art of small-talk has never been my forte, but even for someone deficient in the social graces, I don't know what possessed me to blurt out, in diplomatic incontinence, the tactless view that Euwe was the weakest of the World Champions. This could easily have turned into a horribly embarrassing situation, but thankfully his widow burst out laughing and said that, yes, Max used to say exactly the same thing!

There had been not a scintilla of malevolence in my gauche ejaculation. As a child, I had even met the great man on a couple of occasions – the last time at the closing ceremony in Sas van Gent, in 1978. From those brief encounters, he appeared both dignified and kindly if, perhaps, a touch aloof. Later, particularly after reading Münninghoff and Welling's biography, which gave details on obscure tournaments unbeknown to many, I would revise my opinion of the Dutchman's play a notch or two upwards. Although no prodigy, by the mid-1930s, he had clearly established himself as a worthy challenger for the highest title, and there was nothing fortuitous in his eventual defeat of Alekhine. The widespread, disdainful narrative – one which I swallowed whole for far too long – that the Russian only lost because he was sozzled, unfairly disparages his fine opponent. Nine years on from this famous upset, Euwe was still in rampant form at the Staunton World Chess Tournament in Groningen, before decline inevitably set-in.

One player I could never warm to, though, was the eventual winner of that event, Mikhail Botvinnik. He just wasn't sexy enough. It didn't help that he had already quit chess before I even started – although I never held that against Capablanca, or Alekhine. Whereas Morphy seemed eternally youthful, the myopic patriarch appeared middle-aged, or just old. Stylistically, he had neither the dash of Tal, nor the harmony of Smyslov. 'Disciplined' is the word that springs to mind. And while such a quality is undoubtedly meritorious, it is not necessarily inspirational.

Worse than not being enthused by this dull plodder, I additionally harboured vague feelings of antipathy towards him. The Russian elder had fleetingly but flatteringly complimented me in the foreword to *British Chess* (Pergamon 1983) so any negative emotions were neither mutual, nor personal. Indeed, I would only speak to Botvinnik once in my life – a brief, respectful, anodyne affair – in Brussels, in the company of Bessel Kok and Genna Sosonko. But my real gripe with Botvinnik was how he embodied the infringement of natural justice. On dispassionate appraisal of the evidence, one can only conclude that the World Championship system was grotesquely rigged in his favour (more crooked than a FIDE election, I was about to say, but that, of course, would be hyperbole). After winning the The Hague/Moscow Tournament in 1948, he successively drew, drew, lost, lost and lost matches for the crown. Think about it. Not the most impressive run, to put it mildly, and yet for a remarkable 13(!) out of 15 years he held the throne. How wrong can that be?

If a match is long enough (and an epic of 24 games clearly meets this criterion) it is not unreasonable to give the defending champion odds of a tie. After all, if he has not been defeated, why should he make way for someone new? True, it tips the scales somewhat, but this can add to the drama. For example, a little imbalance would prevent the profoundly unedifying spectacle of both players hurtling towards the tie-break, as we saw in Game 12 of the Carlsen-Karjakin match, last year.

So, no complaints there, but the historically-minded and observant will have noticed that, in Botvinnik's dismal sequence above, I quite deliberately omitted any reference to the two rematches – both of which he won, against Smyslov (in 1958) and Tal (in 1961). As the only triple Grandmaster (in chess, problem-solving and bridge), Jonathan Mestel, pointed out to me several decades ago, if two competitors are of roughly equal strength, a rematch clause provides the incumbent with a 75% chance of remaining champion. Indeed, one doesn't need to be a professor of mathematics, as Jonathan is, to grasp this elementary arithmetical point. In addition to this exorbitant numerical advantage, Botvinnik enjoyed the psychological benefit of playing opponents who were resentful of facing (and therefore ill-prepared mentally) the same vanquished adversary so soon after ascending the throne themselves.

If that weren't bad enough, Yuri Averbakh revealed, in *Centre-Stage and Behind the Scenes* (New in Chess 2011), that Botvinnik was instrumental in the shady attempt to ensure that his challengers were weaker than need

be, by machinating for a cap, of five players, on Candidates from the same country (which, in practice, only meant the Soviet Union). It is doubtful whether he truly succeeded in his objective – after all, his eventual antagonists were, without exception, immensely strong – but his Machiavellian moves were not without consequences. He stiffed the brilliant Ukrainian, Leonid Stein, for one.

As an unapologetic beneficiary of a bent system which blighted the careers of the deserving, Botvinnik does not come across as a very sympathetic character. Oh – and did I mention he was an unreformed communist? Yet, despite this – and here is the nub of it – I regret my aversion to studying the man and his methods. There is much that can be learned, particularly in the areas where your columnist is most lacking.

As a young kid, I recall returning from the local club with an adjournment. My Dad (a weak player) instructed me to 'Analyse it'. I had no concept of what this entailed. I pushed a few pieces around in a desultory fashion, but felt deeply unhappy. This wasn't what the game was about, was it? And in truth, although naturally these skills improved with practice, maturity and necessity, to my detriment, I never came remotely close to mastering 'the art of chess analysis' – to consciously borrow the title of a book by Jan Timman, another Botvinnik fan.

Recently, I read *Black Box Thinking*, a bestseller by Matthew Syed. He writes about the willingness to accept and even embrace failure as an indispensable component of advancement. I immediately thought of Botvinnik and his injunction, to his acolytes, to publish and thereby expose oneself to critical scrutiny. If some reader punches a hole through your conclusions, don't worry. Assimilate the new information, go back, and do

'Yuri Averbakh revealed that Botvinnik was instrumental in the shady attempt to ensure that his challengers were weaker than need be.'

a better job next time. Of course, in an era of immensely powerful engines, the quality of analysis is vastly higher and usually free of the blunders, glaring or otherwise, that obtruded upon the literature of yesteryear. But, even today, laying oneself open to peer-review has great value. If nothing else, it forces a person to think deeply and express himself coherently.

Upon even the most cursory examination, it is impossible not to notice the enormous influence the Patriarch had upon Garry Kasparov who, as is well-known,

'But my real gripe with Botvinnik was how he embodied the infringement of natural justice.'

attended his school as a nipper. This is by no means to imply that the Chairman of the Human Rights Foundation is a carbon-copy of his predecessor. Certainly not – Garry always has been far more dynamic, creative and versatile (not to say stronger). But they shared a stupendous work ethic and a constant striving for the chess truth, as well as openings that stretch deep into the middlegame. Numerous victories, like Kasparov-Andersson, Belfort 1988 (incidentally, where Mikhail Moiseyevich appeared as a guest), have the older man's DNA everywhere. A greater awareness of the maestro's standard plans in the Queen's Gambit Declined, and other openings, might have lessened my own grief over the years...

So, I have decided to immerse myself in Botvinnik's games. It won't improve my career much at this autumnal stage of life, but utility is not everything. As the philosopher Karl Popper succinctly put it, 'True ignorance is not the absence of knowledge, but the refusal to acquire it.' Without consciously making an effort, I have accumulated 14 books, over the years, on this pioneer of Soviet scientific methods. Perhaps I ought to read a few of them. In fact, I have already started. Better late than never.

In 2001, I was invited to the grand Moscow Central Chess Club for a celebration of Vassily Smyslov's 80th birthday. At some point I was asked to say a few words to the assembled gathering. While complimenting the smiling octogenarian, I merrily launched into a diatribe about how much more talented he was than Botvinnik. My flow was interrupted by the journalist, Alexander Roshal, who kept poking me in the side. As I glanced at him in irritation, he whispered that Botvinnik's widow was standing directly in front of me. Oh dear. The same blunder as with Mevrouw Euwe in Amsterdam, but at least this time I had the wit to quickly change subject... ■

Wesley So, who else?

World #2 also wins US Championship

All the favourites took part and with an average rating of 2685, the field in St. Louis was stronger than ever, but seemingly nothing could stop Wesley So from becoming American champion. In a tense tie-break against Alexander Onischuk, the chess star from Minnesota kept his cool to claim the title and the $50,000 first prize.

It's only two years ago, and those who were there will probably never forget the 2015 US Championship. Where Wesley So's self-confidence was undermined by private problems stirred up by the leaders of the chess project at Webster University that he had left to become a professional chess player. And where the insecure youngster lost his chances to fight for first place when he was forfeited for writing admonishing notes to himself on his scoresheet.

And look at him now. In two years' time, Wesley So has grown into a true champion, who feels supported and protected by his new family, and is coached by Vladimir Tukmakov. With what sangfroid did he take a draw in the last round this year, even though both Vladimir Akobian and Alexander Onischuk could claim the title if they won their games with Black. So was confident they wouldn't, and indeed Hikaru Nakamura beat Akobian and Gata Kamsky drew with Onischuk. In the ensuing tiebreak against Onischuk things didn't go as smoothly as So's fans may have expected, but again he didn't lose his nerve and calmly collected the spoils.

And one who could know, Garry Kasparov, expressed his admiration on Twitter: 'Congratulations to Wesley So, the new US champion! It wasn't easy, but hard work paid off for the world #2.'

Possibly the most crucial round in this year's championship was Round 9. While the other top-favourites, Fabiano Caruana and Nakamura, both lost, So played a brilliant game against Junior Champion Jeffery Xiong, that reminded many of Bobby Fischer's Game of the Century against Donald Byrne.

NOTES BY
Wesley So

Jeffery Xiong
Wesley So
St. Louis 2017 (9)
Catalan Opening, Open Variation

One of the best aspects of the US Championship is that it is played at the St. Louis Chess Club run by Rex Sinquefield. Everything there is organized with the players' peace and productivity in mind. The cheerful atmosphere created by his staff, pleasant surroundings, the feeling that you are respected and taken care of, makes it mentally so pleasant. I always look forward to playing here even though it's been the location of my worst losses. Once after a string of horrible games, I was feeling so down and Jeanne Sinquefield saw me and hugged me tight and whispered in my ear, 'Believe me, you're still very young, it will come'. Thank you Jeanne, finally it did come. It wasn't that easy but it was sweet and I dedicate it to this wonderful chess club that has had faith in me.

'The computer does not spot or realize that my combination was winning, even after prolonged analysis.'

This game is one of my most beautiful games recently. It is similar to my game in the 2016 Olympiad against Nikola Sedlak. The computer does not spot or realize that my combination was winning, even after prolonged analysis.

This year's edition of the US Championships was the strongest so far, with an average rating of 2685. The field of players in it was really tough, with a combination of up and coming players, experienced veterans, and an underrated newcomer, Yaroslav Zherebukh. Everybody was extremely well prepared, especially in the openings, and the top seeds found it difficult to win even against lower rated opponents.

Before this game I was on +2 and had to win one more game in order to at least fight for the first place. My opponent was the very talented 16-year-old World Junior Champion Jeffery Xiong. He has made a dramatic rise over the last years, gaining over 200 rating points in about two years, and now is at an incredible 2674. He is improving steadily. He almost won the B-group of Tata Steel Chess too.

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.g3

He chose the Catalan. I play that opening with both colours and am somewhat familiar with the ins and outs of that system. Or so I thought.

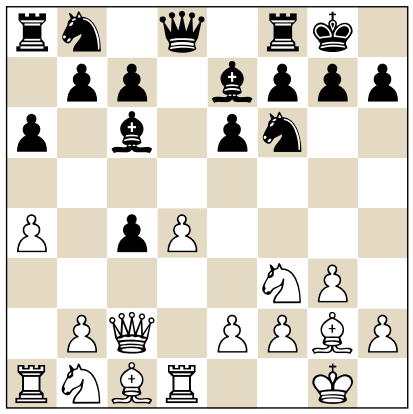
3...d5 4.♗g2 ♗e7

The classical 'Karpov' main line.

4...♗b4+ is another very good reply.

4...dxc4 5.♘f3 c5 has been employed by GM Wojtaszek recently, and seems to be fine as well.

5.♘f3 0-0 6.0-0 dxc4 7.♕c2 a6 8.a4 ♗d7 9.♖d1 ♗c6



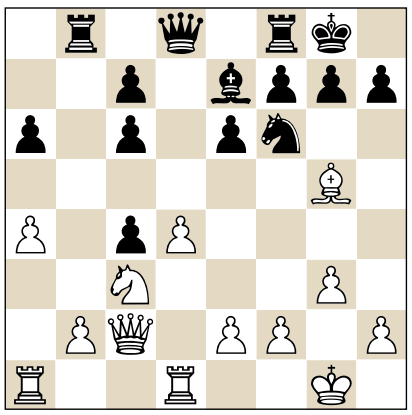
10.♘c3

White desires to occupy the centre with his pawns but he simply does not have the time to do this.

10.♗g5 might be an interesting try, as it has recently been played by GM Grischuk.

10...♗xf3! 11.♗xf3 ♘c6 12.♗xc6 bxc6 13.♗g5 ♖b8

I played fast as I was familiar with the intricacies of the variation, but Jeffery was using a lot of time in between moves. Later on he did not have much time left. I didn't think it would make a big difference though, as the position was pretty tame for now.

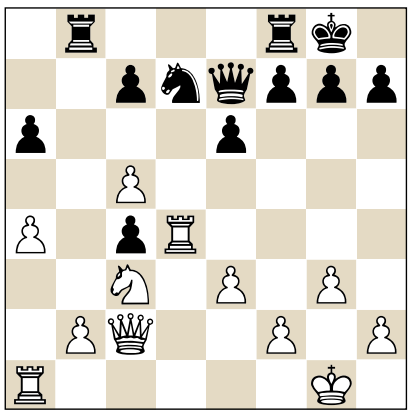


14.e3 After 14.a5 ♖b4 the position is equal.

14...c5 Jeffery had played this position a year before and his opponent, Harmon Velloti, replied 14...♘d5. I think my move was much simpler, because as a rule, I dislike tripled pawns. **15.dxc5** 15.d5 ♘xd5 16.♗xe7 ♕xe7 17.♘xd5 exd5 18.♖xd5 ♖b4 19.♖ad1 h6 leads to a level position.

15...♕e8 16.♖d4 Perhaps the simplest way for White to play is 16.♗xf6 ♗xf6 17.♘e4 ♗xb2 18.♖ab1 c3 with absolutely no losing chances for both sides.

16...♘d7 17.♗xe7 ♕xe7



18.c6?! This was played after a long think. Jeffery had used a lot of time already, and he had around half an hour left to reach move 40. This seems to me the start of White's problems. 18.f4 is the simplest way to avoid any trouble. It controls the e5-square at the cost of slightly opening up his king position.

On the other hand, 18.♖xc4 ♘e5 19.♖e4 ♕xc5 is surprisingly very difficult for White.

18...♘e5 19.♕e4 ♕c5

On 19...♕f6 White plays 20.f4.

20.♘d5

Jeffery had been counting on this knight jump, but things are not that simple.

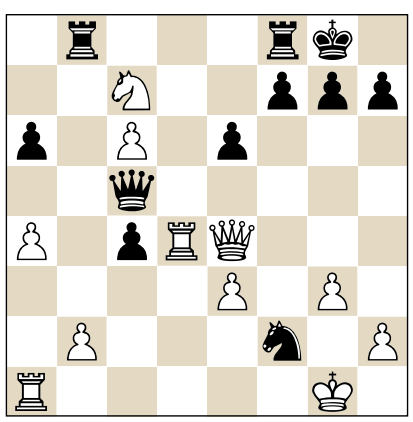
The alternative was 20.f4 ♘g4.

20...♘d3 21.♘xc7

Black is better after both 21.b4 cxb3 22.♕xd3 exd5 23.♖b1 b2 and 21.♘f4 ♘xb2.

Here I didn't think too long or doubt the correctness of the following knight sacrifice. I saw 21...♘xf2 already a few moves back, and understood that I am not risking anything at the very least.

21...♘xf2!

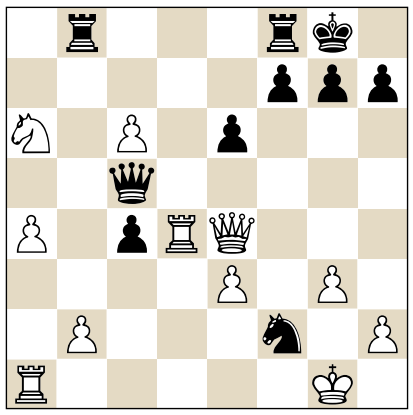


The tactics all work very well for Black. What should White do now?

22.♔xf2?

Looks like the most obvious, but it's a very bad move.

White has a very thin line to reach a decent position and avoid a loss here: 22.♘xa6

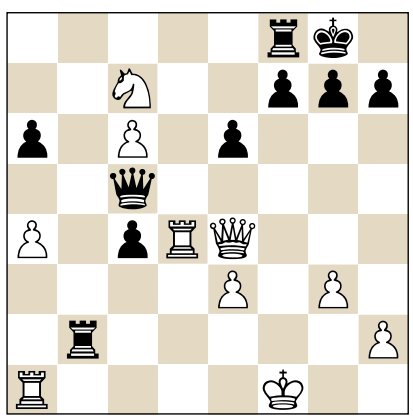


ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

22...♕g5! (22...♘h3+ 23.♔f1! can only be good for White. I saw that I have at least 22...♘xe4 23.♘xc5 ♘xc5 24.♖xc4 ♘a6 25.c7 ♖bc8 26.♖ac1 f5 with an equal ending: 27.♖c6 ♘b4 28.♖xe6 ♖f6 29.♖xf6 gxf6) 23.♔xf2! (Black is winning by force after 23.♕f3 ♖xb2 24.c7 ♘h3+ 25.♔h1 h6 26.♖xc4 ♖f2 27.♕c6 ♕f5 28.♖ac1 ♖c8. It's really tough to spot 22...♕g5, but if Black manages to do so all is good and well) 23...♖xb2+ 24.♔e1. It seems that Black does not have more than equality here: 24...♖xh2 25.♕f3 ♖h1+ 26.♕xh1 ♕xe3+ 27.♔f1 ♕xd4 28.♖e1 ♕b6 29.♕h5, intending 30.♕b5 and it should be a draw.

22...♖xb2+ 23.♔f1

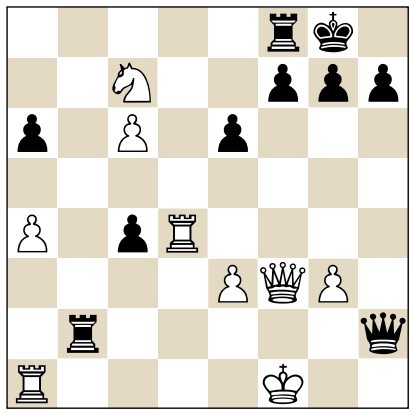
23.♔f3 loses to 23...♕h5+ 24.♕g4 ♕xh2.



23...♕h5 Also sufficient is 23...c3 24.♖c1 ♕h5 25.♖c2 ♕h3+ and wins.

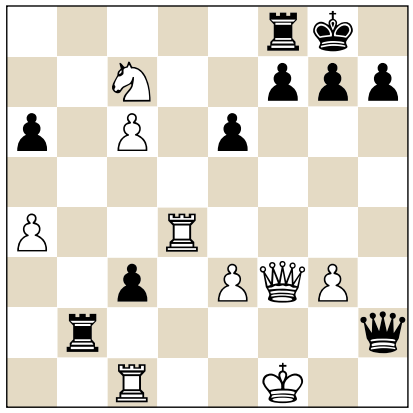
24.♕g4 ♕xh2 25.♕f3

I was not particularly worried that I was down a piece. I have powerful coordination of my major pieces along the 7th rank and White can hardly move. I also have a repetition by giving a queen check on h3 and back, in the worst case.



25...c3! 26.♖c1

After 26.♖h4 ♕c2 27.♔g1 Black has 27...g5 28.♖h1 ♖c8 which should be winning.



26...e5

I considered various different moves here, but this is the only one that works! My main idea is to dislodge his queen from the f3-square. If his queen is forced to move, then checkmate comes. Combining that threat with the strength of my passed c-pawn makes defending impossible for White.

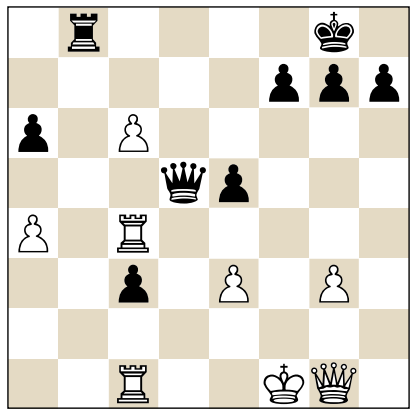
Other moves lead to much more complicated situations, e.g. 26...g5 (or 26...h5) 27.♘e8!. The knight is sacrificed just to gain time to push the pawn to c7.

Round 9 of the 2017 US Championship will be remembered for Wesley So's brilliant win against Jeffery Xiong, a masterpiece reminiscent of Bobby Fischer's Game of the Century.

27.♖h4

I was very happy to see this move as now the win is on autopilot.

27.♖c4 is the only move, when Black still wins, but it's really, really difficult to calculate the lines: 27...♖fb8! (after 27...♕d2 28.♖d1 ♖d8 29.♘d5 ♖xd5 30.♖xd2 ♖dxd2 the difference is that with the rook on c4, Black is not winning anymore) 28.♘d5 ♖f2+ 29.♕xf2 ♕h1+ 30.♕g1 ♕xd5



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

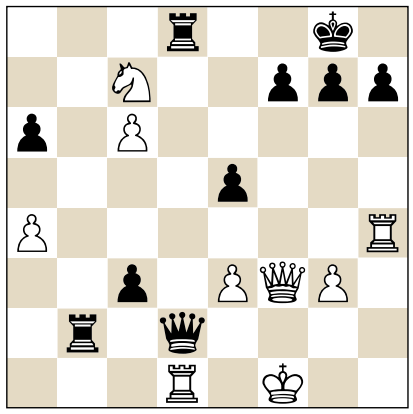
and White is a rook up but completely lost, though its hard to understand what is going on: 31.♖4xc3 ♖b2 32.e4 ♕d2, winning.

There is a very fun line here that could arise after 27.♖g4 ♕d2 28.♖d1 ♖d8 29.♖xd2 ♖dxd2. Black wins, but he first has to avoid a lot of checks.

27...♕d2

I spent a lot of time here to finish the game as I didn't want to mess up the result.

28.♖d1 ♖d8



It's very nice to be able to make moves like this. It's very rare that sacrificing a piece and a queen works out well in a practical game. Usually it's only seen in puzzle books.

29.♘d5 White is also lost after 29.♖xd2 ♖dxd2 30.♔g1 ♖b1+ 31.♕f1 c2 or 29.♖d4 exd4 30.♖xd2 ♖xd2.

29...♖xd5 30.♖d4 ♖xd4 And not 30...exd4? 31.c7 and White wins.

31.exd4 ♕xd1+ And White resigned in view of 32.♕xd1 c2 33.♕c1 ♖b1 34.c7 ♖xc1+ 35.♔e2 ♖e1+.

Jeffery is headed for many more wins in his future, so I hope he didn't mind too much letting me have this one!

It meant a lot to me to win this on my third try. Being US Champion is not something I ever envisioned at any time in my younger years and I don't take this trophy lightly.

Thank you to everyone at the Saint Louis Chess Club. Thank you Rex and Jeanne for supporting chess and making the development of great play possible. You are wonderful. ■

St. Louis 2017

1	Wesley So	2822	7
2	Alexander Onischuk	2667	7
3	Fabiano Caruana	2817	6½
4	Hikaru Nakamura	2793	6½
5	Varuzhan Akobian	2645	6½
6	Yaroslav Zherebukh	2605	5½
7	Samuel Shankland	2666	5
8	Gata Kamsky	2659	5
9	Daniel Naroditsky	2646	5
10	Ray Robson	2668	4½
11	Jeffery Xiong	2674	4
12	Alexander Shabalov	2556	3½

tiebreak: So-Onischuk 1½-½

Better sleeper, better player

There is ample evidence that sleeping well is beneficial for your chess. Yes, you can work on your game with a good night's sleep. Or a power nap. **JENNIFER VALLENS** tells you how to improve as a player by closing your eyes.

'Let him sleep, for when he wakes, he will move mountains.'

... Or push wood.

Does chess play affect your sleep or does sleep affect your chess play? Research points to both. How many of us come home from a long day at the office and decide to unwind before bed by playing a few hours of chess online? Do you find that afterwards you have trouble sleeping? Well, there are reasons for this...

Doctors recommend settling your mind before bed to ensure the best quality of sleep. But when we are up late at night playing blitz (or watching live games), our minds are doing anything but relaxing. In fact, the mental stimulation required for playing these games is detrimental to getting a good night's sleep.

When you play chess online before bed, you are putting yourself in a state of hyper-arousal which can affect your ability to reach a deep sleep and may cause insomnia. The two main types of hyper-arousal related to insomnia include stress and over-stimulation. Playing chess before bed results in both, creating a mind that is 'wired and tired'. The mind becomes overwhelmed and the fight between needing to be in a relaxed state for sleep is fought against the energized state needed for action and creativity.

For this article I interviewed several chess players. GM Elshan Moradiabadi, born in Iran and now representing the USCF, told me that no light and no electronics before bed are his way to ensure a good night's sleep. He couldn't be any more on track. Perhaps the single biggest contributor to our collective sleep problem is the use of artificial lighting and electronics at night. Modern light bulbs and electronics (especially computer monitors), produce *large* amounts of blue light and 'trick' our brains into thinking that it is daytime and therefore affecting our circadian rhythm.

Your circadian rhythm is your internal biological clock and is set by exposure to light. When it gets dark in the evening, a part of the brain called the pineal gland secretes the hormone melatonin. This signals to our bodies and brains that it is time to get tired and go to sleep.

Need for sleep

While the function of sleep is still being researched and hypothesized,

NEW IN CHESS

From an early age on World Champion Magnus Carlsen has been trying to sleep at least nine hours a day during tournaments.

what is not open for debate is that sleep deprivation is dire for proper brain function. Hundreds of established studies indicate that sleep loss severely impairs various cognitive functions and behaviour. Response time, memory recall, reasoning skills, your decision-making capability, your mood, they all go down if you don't sleep enough. Negative effects from poor sleep can start after just 16 hours without sleep, and they get substantially worse as time goes on.

Needless to say, the benefits of sleeping well during a tournament cannot be overestimated, especially if you play two games a day, as is often the case in US Opens. American GM Aleksandr Lenderman fully agrees: 'I make sleep a very important priority during a tournament, probably the most important. Even still sometimes it's hard to get more than 7-8 hours of sleep per night, but I want to make sure 7 hours is the absolute minimum I get. And certainly I try always to nap during tournaments when I get a chance, ranging from 30 minutes to maybe a maximum 2 hours if I'm really tired.'

'Perhaps the single biggest contributor to our collective sleep problem is the use of artificial lighting and electronics at night.'

Extreme focus and careful planning are qualities that are critical in playing your best chess. Magnus Carlsen in his *13 Chess Tips That Every Chess Player Needs to Know* recommends getting enough sleep. He maintains, 'From when I was young, till the age I am now, I always tried to get at least nine hours of sleep, every day when I'm playing

tournaments. It's vital to keep a clear head.'

In contrast, Master Brian Wall from Colorado proudly claims, 'Robert Ramirez and I always insisted on drinking and carousing before any tournament with zero negative effects.' My guess is that if Wall really had zero negative effects, he also had some luck on his side. Normally speaking, when you deprive yourself of sleep, you lose focus and your ability to make sound decisions. Interestingly, a tactic used in combat is to deprive soldiers of sleep so that they will not fight orders or question authority. Sleep deprivation is also used by the CIA as a torture strategy used in terrorist interrogations, and it is also widely implemented among religious cult leaders as a method to brainwash their victims. Lack of sleep reduces people's ability to make sound decisions.

Sleep cycle

A full cycle of sleep has 5 stages. Stage 1 starts in a very light sleep, the kind of sleep you fall into during class or at a board meeting. It lasts about 10 minutes before entering Stage 2. In Stage 2, your heart rate begins to slow and body temperature drops preparing you for a deeper sleep. Stage 3, also called slow-wave sleep, is the start of a deep sleep cycle. During this cycle, your body repairs and regrows tissues, builds bone and muscle, and strengthens your immune system. When you are awakened in this stage, you often feel groggy and disoriented. Stage 4 places you in a very deep sleep. Your heart rate and breathing begins to quicken and finally you land in Stage 5, REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep. This is where our dreams occur. EEGs show how your brain is just as active in this stage as if you were awake. Your body however, is in a state of paralysis.

The whole sleep cycle takes somewhere between 90-120 minutes. On a typical night you'll cycle through four or five times, although not necessarily in the same order. Sleep specialists believe that in stage 3-5, your brain is busy cementing new memories and 'cleaning house' of information that we no longer need.

There is something to be said for the saying 'Sleep on it'. If you are able to adequately cycle through all stages of sleep, you might even solve your chess problems because your brain is still active and is working even when you are sleeping. Frank Marshall, the legendary American champion and the founder of the historic Marshall Chess Club in New York in 1915, used to keep a pocket chess set with him in bed at night so that he might record a game or position from his dreams.

Sabina Foisor, the 2017 US Women's Champion, indicates she has trouble falling asleep only if she has just missed a simple win in more than one place. She tends to analyse the position in her mind a lot... 'Losses from a winning position are the worst. I'm always having nightmares relating to the position, but I think I work it out during my sleep and feel completely fine the next day.'

BEREND VONK

Athletic performance

In recent years, it has become clear that the quality and quantity of sleep obtained by elite athletes can be the edge between winning and losing on game day. 'The Tour is won in bed', said Joop Zoetemelk, a retired Dutch professional road racing cyclist who won the Tour de France in 1980. He credits a good night's rest as being a vital ingredient for winning a race as difficult as the Tour de France.

Fatigue Science co-founder Pat Burne developed the Readiband, a watch that uses technology to characterize sleep/wake timing through the measurement of wrist movement. The Readiband has been employed by several professional sports teams including the Seattle Seahawks, the Seattle Mariners, the New York Giants and The Dallas Mavericks. These coaches see the value of tracking sleep data to strategize how to improve athletic performance.

Further studies conducted by Stanford University's Center for Sleep Sciences and Medicine have proved the effects of extended sleep on athletic performance. Some of their findings show that Stanford's swimming teams increased their sleep goals to 10 hours a night for 7 weeks, which led to improvements in speed, reaction time, turn times and kick strokes. Out of the water,

‘When Boris Spassky was young, he would often excuse himself from chess study to take a short nap and come back relaxed.’

swimmers reported reductions in their levels of daytime sleepiness, improvements in their mood, more energy and less fatigue. Similar results were documented by the Universities’ tennis and basketball teams.

Can the same be said for the mental sport of chess? Unequivocally, yes.

Many chess players make a point to maximize the amount of sleep they get, waking up only shortly before their round begins. Magnus Carlsen is certainly not the only grandmaster who often wakes up only an hour before the game. At the recent Zurich Chess Challenge, where some of the rounds started at 12.30, Hikaru Nakamura, fighting a jet lag, even woke up as late as 15 minutes before he got ready for the round.

But set your alarms folks or you risk oversleeping. Capablanca overslept before a game against Edward Lasker in New York in 1915, and got to the game after one hour and 15 minutes had gone off his clock. Fortunately, the players had a royal two hours for the first 30 moves, and Capablanca, opening with 1.e4, proceeded to outplay Lasker. Not everyone, however, is so lucky. In the 2005 Super-Final of the Russian Championship, GM Alexander Morozevich finished one point behind the winner Sergey Rublevsky. He may have thought back to his game in Round 3 against Dmitry Jakovenko, which he lost by forfeit when he overslept and did not appear at the board.

Power naps

Sleeping well while traveling for tournaments can be quite a challenge. You have the issues of jet lag affecting your circadian rhythm, paired with sleeping in hotel rooms with limited control of room temperature, light and noise. And you may have a sporadic chess round schedule, not to mention the anxiety inherent in competitive play, which is especially difficult if you have double rounds in a day.

US GM Mackenzie Molner from Arizona finds it easier to sleep as long as certain environmental factors are taken care of, like the temperature, sound and darkness of the room. He went on: ‘For this reason I am very particular with who I room with for tournaments I play. I once roomed with a foreign player that told me there is no wind in his country and that it makes him sick. “It” being air conditioning. He wanted it to be 85+ degrees and we spent each night moving the temperature back and forth when we thought the other person was asleep. I really like the guy I roomed with but we weren’t compatible in that sense and I have been more careful choosing my roommates since then.’

Most of the chess players I interviewed said 20-minute naps before rounds were critical to catching up on much needed sleep. Some players even admitted to requesting byes, just to be able to catch up on sleep.

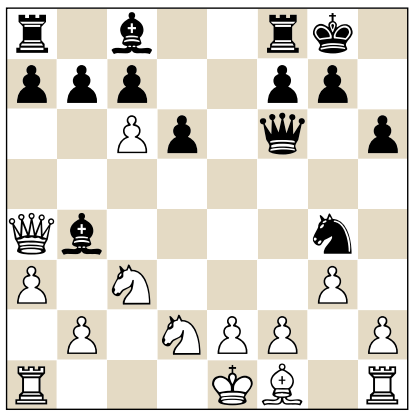
A nap can certainly help prepare you for a round of chess. A nap of ten to twenty minutes is proven to yield mostly Stage 2 of sleep, and therefore enhances alertness and concentration, elevates mood, and sharpens motor skills.

Research on pilots at NASA showed that a 26-minute nap in flight (while the co-pilot was on duty) enhanced performance by 34% and overall alertness by 54%. With those kind of results, it’s no coincidence that some of the world’s top athletes, world

Dream game

In 1961 David Bronstein reputedly played the following game in a dream and wrote it down after waking up. Unfortunately, he later denied the story.

NN - Bronstein
May 8, 1961
1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♗g5 h6 5.♗h4 ♕e7 6.♘f3 d6 7.♕a4+ ♘c6 8.d5 exd5 9.cxd5 ♕e4 10.♘d2 ♕xh4 11.dxc6 0-0 12.a3 ♘g4 13.g3 ♕f6



14.axb4 ♕xf2+ 15.♔d1 b5 16.♕b3 ♗e6 17.♕a3 ♘e3+ 18.♔c1 ♕e1+ 19.♘d1 ♕xd1
Mate.

Bobby yawned

Everyone knows that you need a good night’s sleep to play at the top of your game, but it’s also important that you don’t fall asleep at the board! The recently deceased Arthur Bisguier wrote about a difficult situation he found himself in during a game against Bobby Fischer in his book *The Art of Bisguier, Selected Games 1961-2003*. ‘Paired against Bobby in the New York State Open that year, I noticed that he was taking a long time to move. Then I saw that he’d fallen sound asleep. In a few minutes the flag on his clock would fall, and he’d lose on time. That’s not the way I like to win games, tourneys or titles. So I made what some called my biggest blunder of ►

leaders, and brilliant minds have all been avowed nappers.

When Boris Spassky was young, he would often excuse himself from chess study to take a short nap and come back relaxed.

It is suggested that if you are a night owl and like to go to bed late and wake up between 8.30 and 9 a.m., the best time to nap is between 2.30 and 3 p.m. If you are a morning lark, and go to bed earlier, around 9 or 10 p.m., and wake up earlier in the morning, then you may feel the need for a nap around 1 or 1.30 p.m. It is ideal to nap anytime from 1 to 4 p.m., because napping after that may interfere with your night-time sleep. We all have this afternoon dip in our physiology that causes midday drowsiness, diminishing our reaction time, memory, coordination, mood, and alertness. So it makes sense that if you are between rounds at a chess tournament, that your time may be better spent napping rather than analysing and preparing for your next game.

But also if you are playing just one round, taking a nap before the game may be beneficial. In the mid-90s Gata Kamsky was a dedicated pre-game napper. He would not get up late in the morning, but napped before the game. One of his colleagues to subscribe to his approach was Veselin Topalov.

If you are planning a short nap and need an extra boost, studies at Loughborough University suggest it is best to drink coffee right before your nap. Caffeine takes about 20-30 minutes to take effect, so if you drink a cup of coffee before you nap, it will kick in just as you are waking up. And whatever you do, don't forget to set an alarm. You do not want to sleep longer than you intend and end up drifting into a sleep cycle because that could leave you drowsy.

Chronotypes

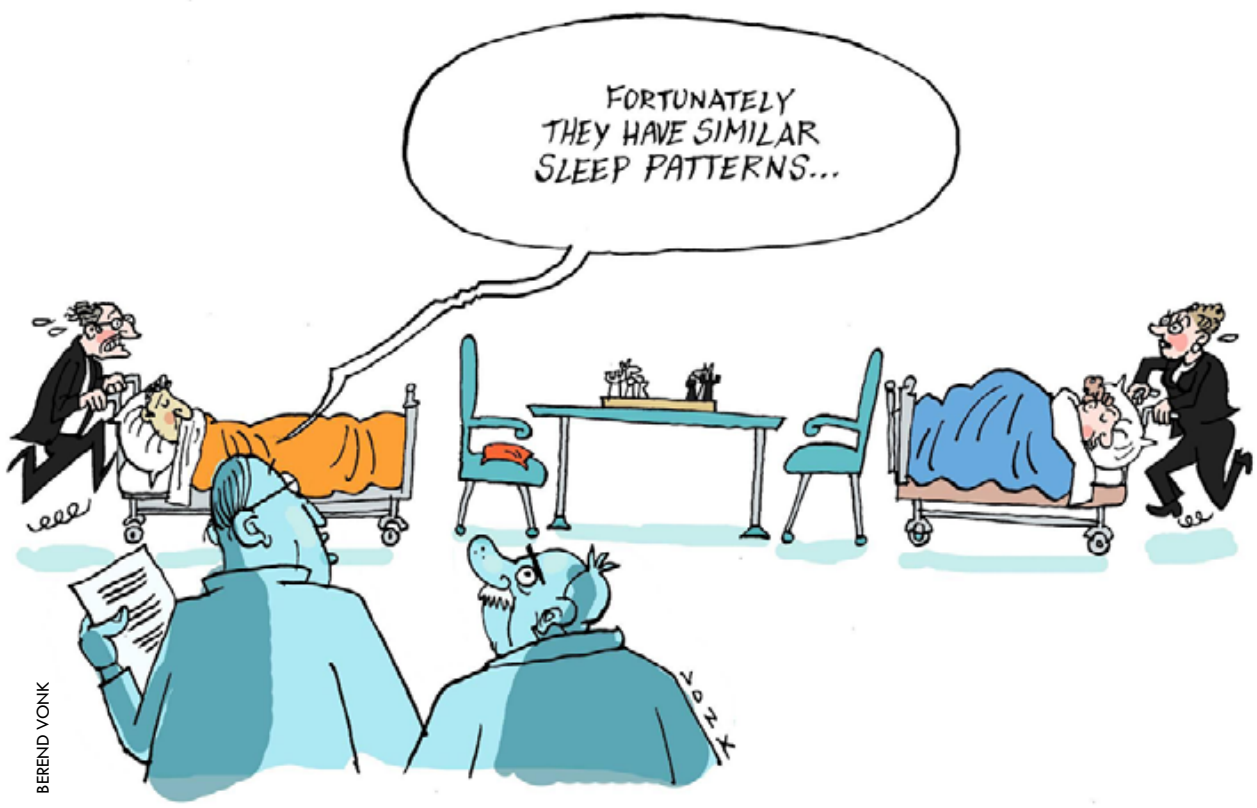
Most chess players identify themselves as night owls, mostly due to necessity. Danish grandmaster Bent Larsen often wrote about his own 'perfect' sleep cycle during tournaments. After a game he would stay awake in his hotel room, typing his chess columns until about 4 or 5 in the morning, then sleep until at least 11 a.m. This was a ritual to him. So much so, that before the tournament would begin, Larsen's competitors would ask the hotel management to not have an adjacent room to Larsen because his typing prevented them from sleeping!

Other prominent night owls are, as already mentioned, World Champion Magnus Carlsen, and former World Champion Vladimir Kramnik. Years after he lost his title, Kramnik once said, half in jest, half in earnest, that he would be World Champion if the match games for the highest title would start at midnight. Carlsen understood what he meant, but told him that he wasn't so sure, as no doubt he would also do very well under these unusual circumstances.

Night owls and morning larks are the two most common chronotypes that we most often refer to. Chronotype is a person's natural preference and propensity to sleep and perform tasks optimally during a 24-hour period. According to Dr. Michael Breus in his book *The Power of When,* if you fall asleep according to your natural rhythm, your sleep will be of higher quality. You'll fall asleep faster, have few awakenings throughout the night, and maybe even sleep more deeply. But, unfortunately, in real life and the life of a professional chess player, it is near impossible to follow your natural rhythms all the time, as factors that affect your circadian rhythm often interfere with your natural sleep/wake schedule.

An interesting study was conducted in Argentina, where a team of psychological scientists turned to online chess matches to see how players processed data and made decisions based on chronotype and the time of day.

The team, which included Women's International Master Maria Juliana Leone and Mariano Sigman of the Association for Psychological Science, found decision-making abilities appear to fluctuate across the day. The research team used data collected from chess players who played at least 2,000 online games. Study participants held an average rating close to 1600 and ranged in age from 19-66. Approximately 100 participants were asked to note their time zone and age and to complete a questionnaire to determine their preference of time for



NEW IN CHESS

Wesley So has no problem falling asleep anywhere, but if you see him at the board like this, the American is most probably concentrating before the game, or praying.

playing and whether they identified themselves as Larks or Owls. They also completed a short questionnaire about their daily sleep routines, meal habits and wake up times. The original hypothesis was that Larks would play their best chess in the morning and Owls would play their best in the evening. But their findings did not support that.

What they found was a person's chronotype did not appear to have any significant impact on play performance. What they found was unexpected. Their studies showed a consistent pattern of decision-making across the board, independent of chronotype. They found that all chess players who played in the morning played slower and more methodical, while evening play was faster, riskier and more aggressive, resulting in more blunders. WIM Leone concluded: 'Because we found no differences in rating, our results suggested that the efficiency of the decision-making process did not change along the day, but only the decision-making policies.'

So, knowing your chronotype may not only help you coordinate your schedule for getting quality sleep, it may also help you approach your chess game and employ strategies in how you use your time in decision-making. This can be very useful during a two game a day tournament schedule.

Resisting the norm

If you routinely fall asleep within 5 minutes of lying down, you are probably severely sleep deprived. The widespread practice of burning the candle at both ends in our society has created so much sleep deprivation, it has become the norm.

Sleep is vital to our optimal health and well-being. Giving yourself a full night of sleep, along with naps, will help your chess development and keep you playing at your very best.

With all this said, if you happen to be a GM rising through the ranks hoping to become the number one chess player in the world like Wesley So, sleep may not even be an issue. According to Wesley's mom Lotis Key, Wesley has no problem dropping off practically instantly night or day, no matter what he is doing, riding in a car, flying in an airplane, in a boat, on the beach, watching a movie... even when excited to play the next day, he will fall asleep easily the night before. 'So yes, I guess, he likes to sleep and I assume it helps his game.' She mused, 'he must have a very clear conscience.' That may be true for him, but what does that say for the rest of us?! ■

► the tournament. I awakened Fischer. Bobby yawned, made a move, punched his clock and proceeded to beat me. It ended up as Game 45 in his *My 60 Memorable Games*. Later I heard that Fischer had stayed up late the previous night playing speed chess for money.'

Eyes wide shut

Jay Stallings, chess coach and creator of the Coach Jay's Chess Academy chess app, recalls watching IM Igor Ivanov at a Las Vegas chess tournament. 'I watched as he took naps at the board. Whenever his 2100-rated opponent moved, the opponent would do it with as much as stealth as possible, pressing the chess clock as though a sound would surely be the end of the world. Ivanov's eyes would flutter open from time to time, and if he saw his opponent had moved, he would immediately reach out, play his move, hit his clock, then go back to sleep. Despite being down material when I started watching the game, he was able to draw!'

Expert advice

Some tips on how to get a better night's sleep:

1. Read a book instead of spending the hours before you go to sleep in front of a television or computer screen.
2. Abstain from alcohol in the evening.
3. Identify your chronotype.
4. Choose flights and a nap schedule that will support your natural rhythm.
5. In the evening, wear amber-coloured glasses while at the computer and put down the electronics at least an hour before bed.
6. Exercise during the day.
7. Learn to calm your mind before bed. Take a warm bath, meditate, do yoga and practice breathing exercises.

You would expect a player who has just claimed a category-20 elite tournament with a 5½/7 score and a 2953 Elo performance to be happy, but it took a while before Levon Aronian, the uncontested winner of the Grenke Chess Classic 2017, could relax a bit, smile and enjoy his victory. **ERIC VAN REEM** reports.

Levon Aronian won four games in seven rounds, but felt he should have added a fifth victory against Fabiano Caruana on the final day.

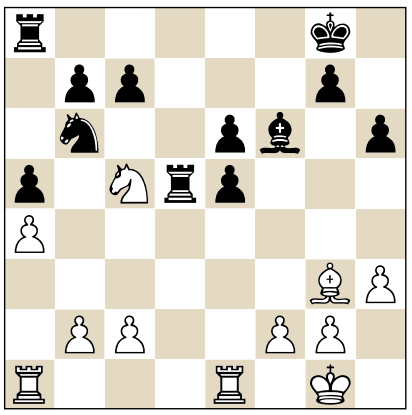
LENNART OOTES

Aronian bounces back in Baden-Baden

First tourney victory for Armenian since 2015 Sinquefield Cup

After he had convincingly won four games in a row, Levon Aronian claimed the Grenke Chess Classic 2017 with a round to spare. An eruption of strength and creativity had given the Armenian a one-and-a half-point lead that World Champion Magnus Carlsen and second seed Fabiano Caruana could no longer make good. So a draw with black against Caruana in the final round the next day looked like a normal and satisfactory outcome. Aronian, however, begged to differ: 'It is always nice to play a game that does not change the overall result of the tournament, but I am upset that I did not win the game against Fabiano.' Let us have a look at what caused Aronian's annoyance:

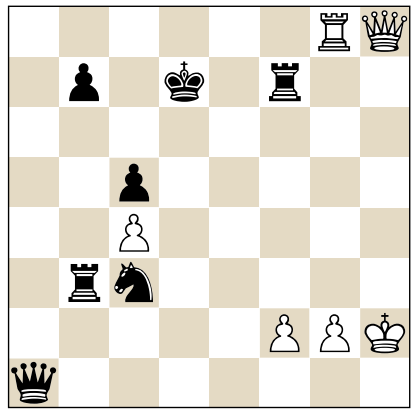
Fabiano Caruana
Levon Aronian
Baden-Baden 2017 (7)



position after 21...♖d5

White decided to grab the pawn on e6, but soon found out that the knight felt rather uncomfortable there.

22.♘xe6? ♖c8 23.b3? And the knight was trapped after **23...c5! 24.c4 ♖d6 25.♘xg7** The best practical chance. **25....♔xg7** Caruana admitted in the press conference that he had considered resigning here or a few moves later, but decided to continue to fight. Black is simply a piece up.
Everything continued to go Aronian's way and he seemed to be heading for his fifth consecutive win to end the tournament in great style.
26.♗xe5 ♖d3 27.♗xf6+ ♔xf6 28.♖e4 ♖c7 29.♖ae1 ♖xb3 30.♖f4+ ♔g7 31.♖e6 ♘xa4 32.♖g4+ ♔f8 33.♖xh6 ♖f7 34.♖h8+ ♔e7 35.h4 ♘c3 36.h5 a4 37.h6 a3 38.h7 a2 39.♖e8+ ♔xe8 40.h8♕+ ♔d7 41.♔h2 a1♕ 42.♖g8!



And now, after thinking for 50 minutes, Aronian came up with the unfortunate: **42...♕a5?**, failing to nail the win. The winning move was 42...♕e1! with the point that Black can block 43.♕h3+

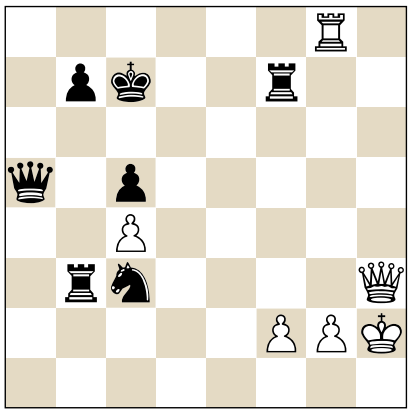
ERIC VAN REEM

The around 1000 spectators at the Grenke Classic included some of Levon Aronian's staunchest fans, Armenian supporters from the Czech Republic.

with 43...♕e6, and although 44.♖d8+ ♔xd8 45.♕xe6 wins material, Black remains a piece up.

'I couldn't believe I couldn't win it', Aronian said after the game. 'Of course I should have been more pragmatic – I should have thought for 10 minutes, walked around, refreshed myself and come back to the game.'

43.♕h3+ ♔c7



44.♕g3+ Missed by Aronian. **44...♔d7 45.♕d3+ ♔e7 46.♕e3+ ♔d6 47.♖g6+ ♔c7 48.♕e5+ ♔c8 49.♖g8+ ♕d8 50.♕xc5+ ♖c7 51.♖xd8+ ♔xd8 52.♕f8+ ♔d7 53.g4 ♖b2 54.♕f3 ♔e8 55.♕xc3 ♖xf2+ 56.♔g3 ♖ff7 57.g5 ♖g7 58.♔g4 ♔f8 59.♕f6+ ♔g8 60.g6 ♖xg6+ 61.♕xg6+** Draw.

With his final score of 5½/7 Aronian remained unbeaten, and he clearly dominated the tournament after shaky draws in the first two rounds. It was the Armenian's first tournament victory since the 2015 Sinquefield Cup. Aronian: 'I played a lot of tournaments in 2016 and some tournaments did not go as I'd planned, so I decided to take some time off. I spent some time with my friends, just enjoying life generally. It was good to take a rest from chess and it obviously yielded some result.'

The Grenke Chess Classic returned to the calendar after previous events in 2011, 2013 and 2015. Those tournaments were played in the tranquillity of Baden-Baden, a spa that breathes chess and history. Just think of the great tournaments there in 1870 and 1925.

For this fourth edition of the Grenke Classic, the organizers decided to split the tournament and play in two different cities. The first three rounds took place in Karlsruhe, just a few miles away from Baden-Baden. The massive Grenke Open, a nine-round Swiss organized in Karlsruhe over the Easter Holidays, attracted more than 1200 players. Top-seed Nikita Vitiugov won with 7½/9 and may look forward to receiving an invitation for the next main event.

The stars in the Classic started their seven-round event on Easter Saturday and played alongside the Open. The reason for starting the Classic on Easter Saturday was an odd one. On Good Friday, many activities are prohibited by German law. The most infamous of Germany's banned Good Friday activities is dancing. The 'dancing ban' (*Tanzverbot*) has long been disputed and violators risk fines of up to 1500 euro. Many public sporting events are included in the ban during Germany's 'silent public holidays'. In fact, playing a chess tournament was allowed, but broadcasting the games to the outside world was prohibited. This meant that on Good Friday, the event would have to be a 'closed event' at which, strictly speaking, not even visitors would be allowed to enter the venue! Without a live broadcast and without visitors, it would not make much sense to play chess.

It was a clever move to play the two events under one roof, since it was obvious that many amateurs had jumped at the opportunity to play in the same hall as the World Champion and the other top players. The rounds in the 'Schwarzwaldhalle' also attracted many visitors, creating a lovely festival atmosphere. Entry was free and the games were commented on by German grandmaster Klaus Bischoff via wireless headphones. You could see on the faces of the players on stage that they do not often play in front of some 1000 spectators, but they obviously appreciated the attention.

The field was a nice mixture: Magnus Carlsen, Fabiano Caruana, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, Levon Aronian, 2015 co-winner Arkadij Naiditsch, German GMs Matthias Blübaum and Georg Meier and the highest rated woman player, Hou Yifan. The Chinese player started the tournament with a bang when she defeated Caruana. She then also won against Meier and in the third and last round in Karlsruhe she drew the eagerly anticipated game against Magnus Carlsen. As a result, she travelled to Baden-Baden as the tournament leader. Here are her comments to her game against Caruana.

NOTES BY
Hou Yifan

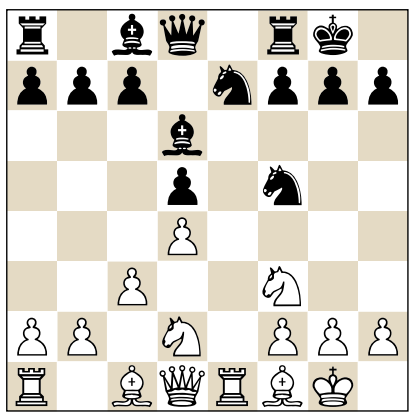
Hou Yifan
Fabiano Caruana
Baden-Baden 2017 (1)
Ruy Lopez, Berlin Defence

I had a wonderful time at the Grenke Chess Classic and generally speaking I am satisfied with my performance if we don't consider how the tournament ended for me. Objectively, this is my best result in a super-tournament so far, so there is no reason to complain, but after my 2½ out of 3 start any professional player would hope for more than what I accomplished in the second part. This is how the tournament started for me. I have played Fabiano many times since 2008, but this was my first win after having spoiled several winning positions in the past years.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.♖e1 A solid strategy, which probably surprised Fabiano, because I haven't played this line in the last couple of years.

5...♘d6 6.♘xe5 ♗e7 7.♗f1 0-0 After some thought Fabiano decided to go for his alternative main line instead of the usual 7...♘xe5 8.♖xe5 0-0 9.♘c3.

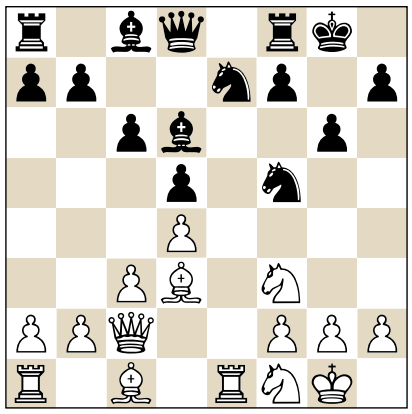
8.d4 ♘f5 9.♘f3 d5 10.c3 ♗d6 11.♘bd2 ♘ce7



During the game I remembered that Kramnik used to play this set-up when he wanted a real game, and this is the idea of Black's choice.
Another reasonable option is 11...♖e8 to simplify the position.

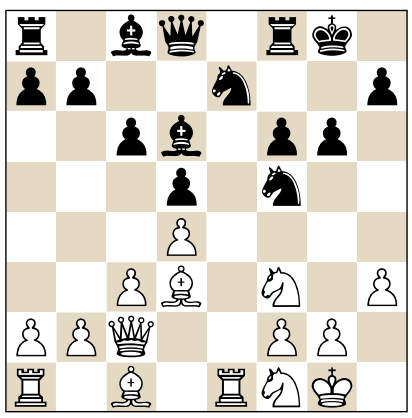
12.♕c2 c6 More natural is 12...♘g6 13.g3 (the idea behind ♕c2, although leaving the bishop on f1 for the moment won't make much difference) 13...c6 14.♗d3 ♕f6.

13.♗d3 g6 14.♘f1



14...f6 White has a slight advantage due to Black's badly coordinated pieces after 14...♘g7 (with the idea of ...♗f5) 15.♘e3! ♘ef5 16.♘g4, exploiting the weakened dark squares. The game continues and there is no reason to complain when White gets such a comfortable position with the Berlin ♖e1 line.

15.h3 An interesting waiting move. During the post-game commentary Peter Leko gave it an exclamation mark because of the possible ♘1h2/♘g4 idea.

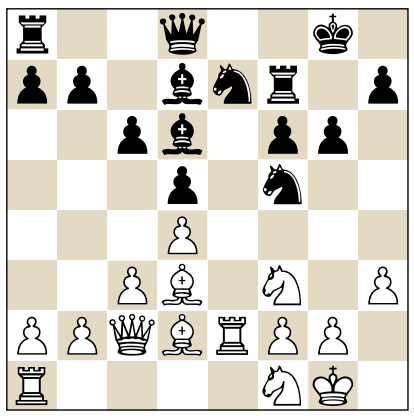


15...♖f7 Peter Leko and Lawrence Trent looked at the following line: 15...♘g7 16.♘e3 ♘ef5 17.♘g4 ♗e6 18.♖xe6!? ♘xe6 19.♗xf5 gxf5 20.♕xf5, and White clearly has enough compensation. Even if the sacrifice on e6 was not necessary, it is always nice when such opportunities turn up in symmetrical positions.
Another manoeuvring plan is 15...♗c7 16.♘1h2 ♘d6 17.♘g4, when Black is always a tempo short to successfully start exchanges with ...♗f5.

16.♗d2 ♗d7
A very simple plan: move out the bishop and double the rooks on the e-file. But 16...♘g7 17.♖e2 ♗f5 18.♖ae1 ♕d7 was objectively still the best option for Black to relieve the pressure.

17.♖e2
After some deliberation I decided to follow my original plan. Considering that Black's pieces are not well-coordinated, it was also possible to slowly improve my position with 17.b3.

'I have played Fabiano many times since 2008, but this was my first win after having spoiled several winning positions.'



17...c5?!
Too rash. This push changes the course of the game and creates a weakness and a clear target.
The ...c5 idea was playable, because it threatens ...c4, which requires White to move some pieces from ideal positions, but it had to be prepared: 17...b6 18.c4 (otherwise White allows ...c5 and has nothing) 18...dxc4 19.♗xc4 ♘d5 20.♘e3 ♗e6. Practically speaking, Black now needs to be careful, since

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In front of a full house, Hou Yifan started with a bang as she sensationally defeated second seed Fabiano Caruana in Round 1.

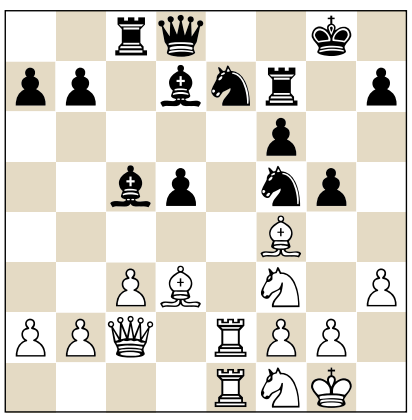
his position is a bit exposed, but with his active pieces this won't be a huge problem.

18.dxc5 ♗xc5 19.♗f4

As soon as I saw a good place for my dark-squared bishop, I decided to take it there at once. Obviously, 19.♖ae1 b5 20.♘e3 also secures an advantage.

19...♖c8 20.♖ae1 g5

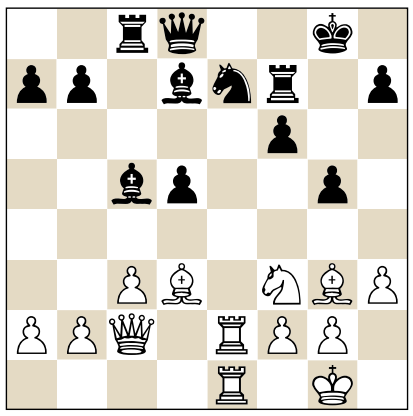
A final try, since it was already very difficult to suggest alternatives. After 20...b5 White plays 21.♕d2.



21.♘g3!

During the game I also considered 21.♘e3 ♘h6 (after 21...♘xe3?! 22.♗xe3 the bishop is better placed on e3) 22.♗g3. This is still much better for White, but it also offers chances like ...d4 later on, so I preferred the text-move to maintain my control of the position.

21...♘xg3 22.♗xg3



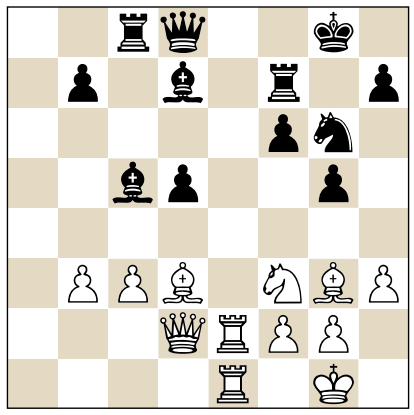
22...a5

After this move the rest becomes more or less irrelevant. I was more concerned about 22...g4 23.hxg4 (unfortunately the attractive 23.♘h4 doesn't work: 23...gxh3 24.♘f5 ♘xf5 25.♗xf5 ♖g7! – threatening the bishop on g3 – 26.♔h2 hxg2 27.♕d3 ♗xf5 28.♕xf5 ♕d7!) 23...♗xg4 24.♕a4! ♗xf3 (other defences such as 24...♖g7 25.♕f4 make no sense) 25.gxf3 ♖g7 26.♕h4, and the many holes in his position make Black's situation hopeless. It's very important to activate the queen via a4-h4. Now, even with doubled f-pawns, the attack is decisive.

23.♕d2 Preparing b4. **23...a4** 23...g4 is even worse: 24.hxg4 ♗xg4 25.♕f4. **24.b4 axb3 25.axb3**

Slowly improving the position. It is already very difficult to find a useful move for Black, which is normally considered to be a negative sign.

25...♘g6

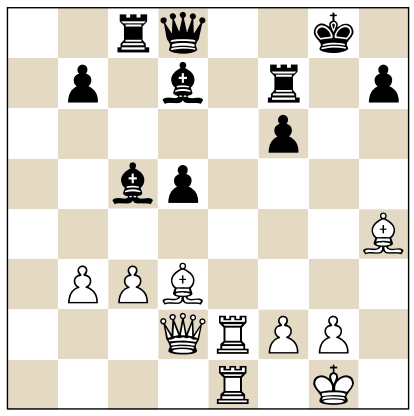


26.h4 Moving his knight to g6 was Black's best practical try, hoping for 26.♗xg6?! hxg6 27.♕xd5 ♗b5!, when the forced queen swap will give Black some drawing chances.

I considered the immediate 26.♘d4, but after 26...♗xd4 27.cxd4 ♕b6, Black might succeed in setting up a fortress with a pawn chain and his minor pieces. So I decided to start with h4.

26...gxh4 Bad is 26...g4?! 27.♘d4 (now h5 is a threat) 27...♗xd4 28.cxd4, and with the inclusion of h4 and ... g4 White has a much better version of the game.

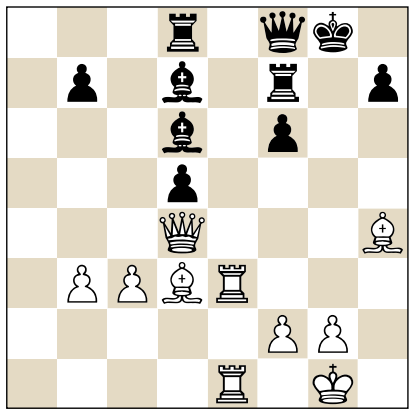
27.♘xh4 ♘xh4 28.♗xh4



28...♕f8 The line that had to be calculated before going 26.h4 was 28...♗g4 29.♖e8+ (the simplest approach; actually, I was going to play 29.♖e5!? – threatening to take on d5 – 29...fxe5 30.♗xd8 ♗xf2+ 31.♔h2 ♗xe1 32.♕xe1 ♖xd8 33.♕h4!) 29...♕xe8 30.♖xe8+ ♖xe8 31.♗xf6, and White wins.

29.♕f4 Finally, the right square for the queen! We are already familiar with the idea from the variations given above. The position of Black's king and his four isolated pawns indicate that the story is approaching its end.

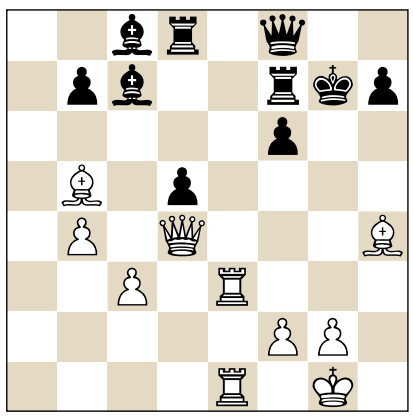
29...♗d6 30.♕d4 ♖d8 31.♖e3!?



31...♗c8

After 31...♗c5 there is 32.♖g3+ ♔h8 33.♕xd5 ♗b5 34.♕f5, and White wins. And after 31...♕h6 White has 32.♗g3, the idea of ♖e3, which also wins.

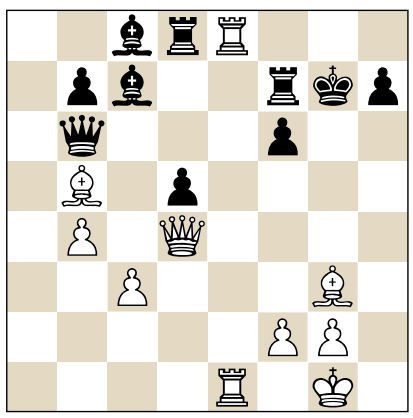
32.b4 ♔g7 33.♗b5 ♗c7



34.♖e8

There are many ways to finish the game. It could have been as simple as 34.♗e8 or as beautiful as 34.♖e7!. Either way, both are more accurate than what I did.

34...♕d6 35.♗g3 ♕b6



36.♕d3! Luckily I had this one.

36...♗d7 37.♗xd7 ♖dxd7 38.♕f5 ♗xg3 39.♕g4+ ♔h6 40.♕h3+ Black resigned.

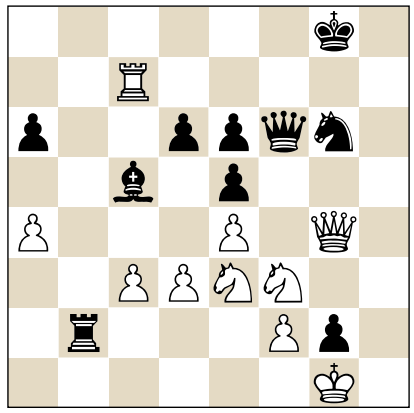
■ ■ ■

In Baden-Baden, the venue was the Event-Akademie. The playing hall was undoubtedly beautiful, but the location, a few miles outside the city centre in an unattractive suburban neighbourhood, was a bit unfortunate.

What about the World Champion? In the first game of the tournament, the Norwegian surprised everyone with a novelty before even one move was played and stole the show... by wearing glasses. In the press conference afterwards he explained why: 'I took a test recently. I was always a little short-sighted, but I was always told that wearing glasses was optional – it's your choice, you don't need to. But after suffering from headaches recently I took a new test, and it turned out that all sorts of things were wrong, so I no longer had a choice.'

Carlsen failed to win his first-round game against 20-year-old Matthias Blübaum, despite a positional advantage and oceans of time. In the second round he played a thriller against Levon Aronian. The game ended in a draw, but according to commentator Peter Leko it was not a game you see every day: 'I was calling this the game of recent years, because, to be honest, I have never seen such a fascinating draw!'

Magnus Carlsen
Levon Aronian
Baden-Baden 2017 (2)



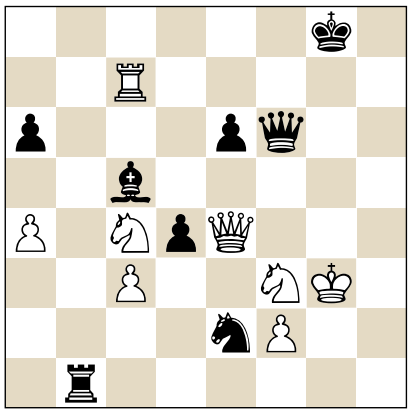
position after 29...♖b2

White finds a nice forced move sequence here: **30.d4! exd4 31.e5!**

World Champion Magnus Carlsen turned up wearing glasses. The wild hairdo was a one-off affair after a relaxing visit to a local spa.

ERIC VAN REEM

dxe5 Played after only five minutes, and White showed the point of his play: **32.♘c4! ♖b1+ 33.♔xg2 e4!?** In a very difficult position, Aronian finds the best practical move. Now 34.♘fe5! is winning, but Carlsen thought he had found something easier: **34.♕xe4? ♘f4+ 35.♔g3 ♘e2+!**



This is the move White had missed. The knight cannot be taken, because Black can force a draw by perpetual check, starting with 36...♕g6+. **36.♔g4 ♕f5+ 37.♕xf5 exf5 38.♔xf5 dxc3 39.♖xc5 c2 40.♖c8+ ♔g7 41.♖c7+ ♔g8 42.♔f6!** A computer would play 42...♖b8 and show 0.00, but afterwards the players agreed that in an actual game this feels way too risky with the white pieces heading for the black king. Aronian played **42...♖g1** instead, and after **43.♘xg1 c1♕ 44.♘xe2** Black was able to pick up the knight and reached a complicated ♕ vs. ♖+♘+♙ ending that, according to the table bases, was a draw. Carlsen still had some practical chances, but had to settle for a draw after 70 moves.

This thriller proved to be a key moment in the tournament. Aronian started his winning streak, while Carlsen managed to win only one game (against Meier) after surviving a scare against Hou Yifan in Round 3.

For Carlsen, seven rounds was a bit too short, an opinion that was shared by the other elite players, but the Grenke Classic nevertheless proved to be a feast for fighting chess. From now on, it will be an annual fixture on the calendar.

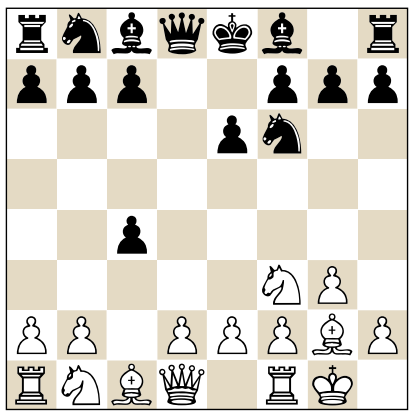
Tournament director Sven Noppes and his team are confident about the future of the event: 'We think that this is one of the best tournaments in the world, and we are sure that many top players will love to play here.' Tournament winner Levon Aronian does not care much about the future tournament format, though, and said: 'I like to play in every tournament that I win.'

NOTES BY
Levon Aronian

Levon Aronian
Arkadij Naiditsch
Baden-Baden 2017 (5)
English, Neo-Catalan

1.c4 e6 2.g3 d5 3.♗g2 ♘f6
3...dxc4 has its points, as, for example, was shown by the original Hungarian player Berkes in a game against Fressinet. In it after the quite normal 4.♕a4+ ♘d7 5.♕xc4 c5 6.♕c2 came the extravagant 6...♘e7 followed by ...♘c6 and ...g6!

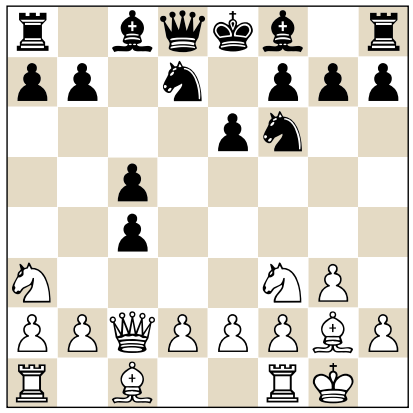
4.♘f3 dxc4 5.0-0
5.♕a4+ is more popular, as I myself have played many times. Generally speaking, in recent years gambits with a Catalan bishop have become popular, for example in the Réti Opening after 1.♘f3 d5 2.g3 c6 3.♗g2 ♘f6 4.c4, or in the Slav after 1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.g3. Romanishin's bold concepts have finally, after several decades, deservedly acquired an increasing number of followers among strong players.



5...♘bd7
One of the logical continuations. The main justification for White's lack of concern over the regaining of the c4-pawn is that after 5...a6 6.♕c2 b5 he has the interesting move 7.♘e1, with the idea after d3 of playing for compensation, thanks to the excellent position of the knight on d3 and his rapid development.

6.♕c2 c5
A sound move. The most aggressive for Black is 6...♘b6, which keeps the extra pawn, and leads to very complicated play both in the event of 7.♘a3 and after 7.♖d1. White can exchange the c4-pawn by b3 or d3 and try to exploit the activity of his pieces. 6...a6 is also not bad, after which one of the probable variations is 7.a4 ♘c5 8.♕xc4 ♕d5 9.♕a2 ♕xa2 10.♖xa2 e5 11.♘xe5 ♗e6 12.b3 0-0-0. As a schoolteacher said in a well-known anecdote in the former USSR: 'Children, it is not possible to understand this, it must be memorized'.

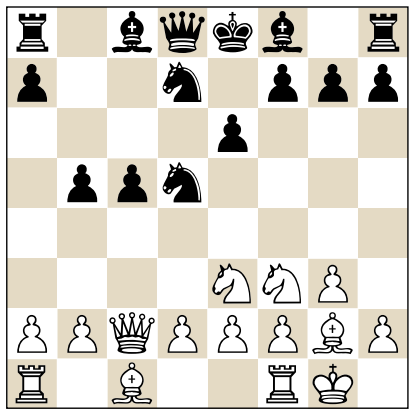
7.♘a3
The queen is ideally placed on c2, and for this reason the knight heads for the pawn.



7...♘d5 An unsuccessful idea. Instead of developing his pieces, Black makes a second move with an already developed piece. 7...b6, as well as 7...♖b8 with the idea after 8.♘xc4 of developing by 8...b5 9.♘ce5 ♗b7, would have led to an acceptable game.

8.♘xc4
Natural and good.

8...b5 9.♘e3
Of course, it is logical to exchange the knight which has moved the most.



9...♗b7

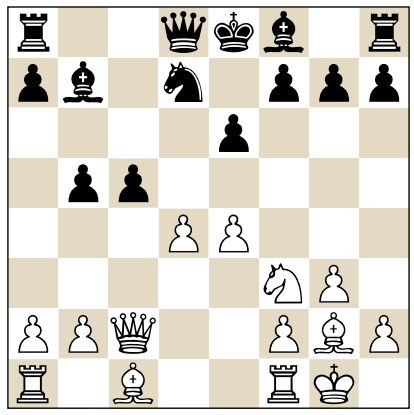
Virtually the decisive mistake! As it seemed to me during the game, 9...♘b4 was better, after which any queen move would leave White with the better chances, but would not have allowed him to seize the centre unhindered because of the not ideally placed knight on e3. It should be mentioned that after 9...♘xe3 the move I was planning, 10.fxe3, is not so strong, since after 10...♗b7 11.♘e5 ♘xe5 12.♗xb7 ♖b8 Black succeeds in consolidating, and 10.dxe3 ♗b7 11.♖d1 is stronger, with a pleasant position for White, since after simply developing with b3, apart from piece activity he has an easy target to attack – the hanging pawn on c5.

10.♘xd5 ♗xd5

After 10...exd5, apart from my planned 11.♘h4, very strong was 11.b4 with rapid development and a very dangerous initiative.

11.e4 I once heard the chess philosopher Evgeny Sveshnikov say: 'If White is allowed to occupy the centre with his pawns, this usually leaves Black in danger of defeat.' In this position I am in agreement with him.

11...♗b7 12.d4



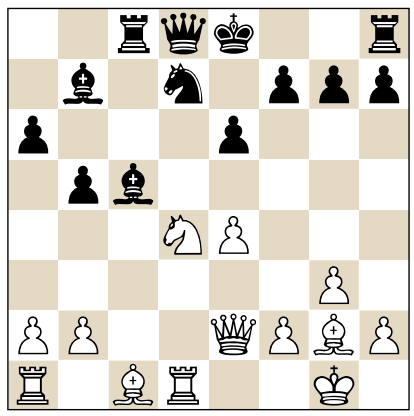
12...cxd4 A forced measure, since after 12...♗e7 13.d5 exd5 14.exd5 0-0 15.d6 ♗f6 16.♘g5 ♗xg5 17.♗xb7 ♖b8 18.♗xg5 ♕xg5 19.♗c6 the d6-pawn must decide the game.

13.♘xd4 White has a lead in development, and around here I was thinking that victory was not far off.

13...♖c8 From the practical point of view, this is an inaccuracy. To me it seems more resilient to play 13...♕b6 14.♖d1 ♖c8 15.♕e2 b4, with a bad, but at least active position.

14.♕e2 a6 15.♖d1 ♗c5

If 15...♗e7, then 16.♗h3 is very unpleasant, when the threats of capturing on e6 are difficult to parry.

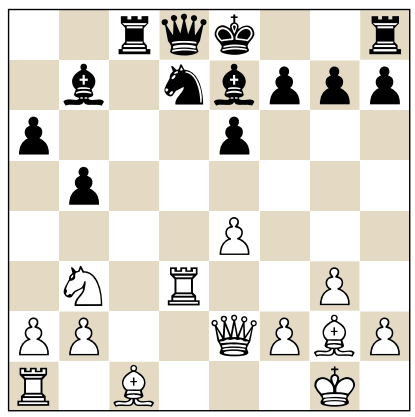


16.♘b3 After thinking for 7 minutes and noticing the move ♖d3, I decided to follow my instincts, and at the same time try to drive my opponent into time-trouble.

16...♗e7

After 16...♗b6 17.♗f4 0-0 18.♖d2 Black has no normal defence against the threat of 19.♖ad1. And 16...0-0 would have lost quickly to 17.♘xc5 ♖xc5 18.♕d3, when it can be seen that the gathering of the harvest is not far off.

17.♖d3

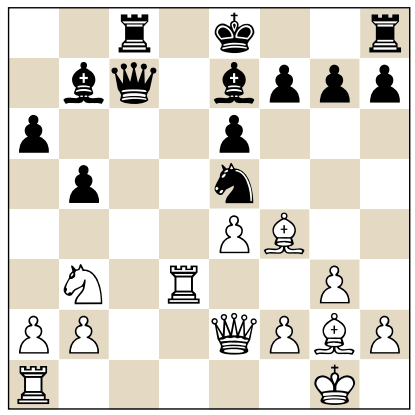


A strong move, after which the game passes into the conversion phase.

17...♕c7

Not the most resilient, but it is not clear what can be suggested for Black. The 'normal' 17...0-0 fails to 18.♖d1 ♗c6 19.♘d4 with loss of material, while other moves such as 17...♗c6 do not look promising.

18.♗f4 ♘e5



19.♖c3

19.♖c1 ♕b8 20.♖xc8+ ♗xc8 21.♘a5 would have won more simply, but the abundance of good moves caused me to lose my vigilance.

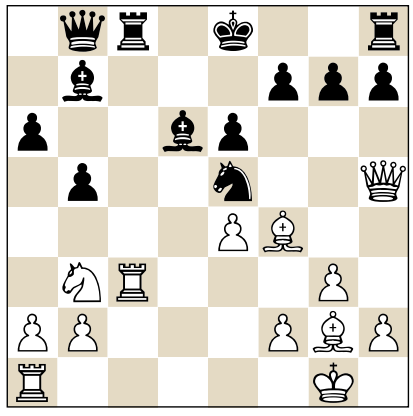
19...♕b8 20.♕h5 ♗d6

Baden-Baden 2017 — cat. XX

					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		TPR
1	Levon Aronian	IGM	ARM	2774	*	½	½	1	1	1	½	1	5½	2953
2	Magnus Carlsen	IGM	NOR	2838	½	*	½	½	½	½	1	½	4	2764
3	Fabiano Caruana	IGM	USA	2817	½	½	*	0	½	1	1	½	4	2767
4	Hou Yifan	IGM	CHN	2649	0	½	1	*	0	½	1	½	3½	2741
5	Maxime Vachier-Lagrave	IGM	FRA	2803	0	½	½	1	*	0	½	1	3½	2719
6	Arkadij Naiditsch	IGM	AZE	2702	0	½	0	½	1	*	½	1	3½	2733
7	Georg Meier	IGM	GER	2621	½	0	0	0	½	½	*	½	2	2587
8	Matthias Blübaum	IGM	GER	2634	0	½	½	½	0	0	½	*	2	2585

I had overlooked the idea associated with this move.

20...♗f6 would have lost easily to 21.♖xc8+ ♗xc8 22.♖c1 g6 23.♗xe5 ♗xe5 24.♖xc8+ and 20...♖xc3 to 21.♗xe5 ♖c7 22.♗xg7.

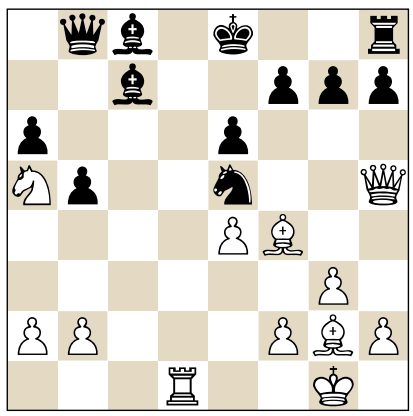


21.♖xc8+

In advance I thought that 21.♘c5 would conclude the game, but on closer inspection I noticed a brilliant defence in the form of 21...♖xc5 22.♖xc5 ♗xc5 23.♗xe5 g6 24.♕g5 ♗e7 25.♕f4 g5 with merely a lost endgame for Black. If I had known that subsequently I would use all the features of my talent to take the game practically to a draw, I would probably have gone in for this easily won endgame with an extra pawn.

21...♗xc8 22.♖d1 ♗c7 23.♘a5

It seemed to me that this move should settle matters. In reality, intrigue returns to the play.



23...♗d7

Apart from this, which I thought was the only move but a losing one, Black had an opportunity to buy his opponent off at the cost of a pawn, with the help of a tactical idea. After 23...0-0 24.♗xe5 ♗xe5 25.♘c6 he has the pretty 25...♕c7 26.♘xe5 g6, which of course leads to a position that is still won for White, but as Boris Gelfand aptly comments in such cases, the play passes 'into the zone of one mistake'.

24.♗xe5

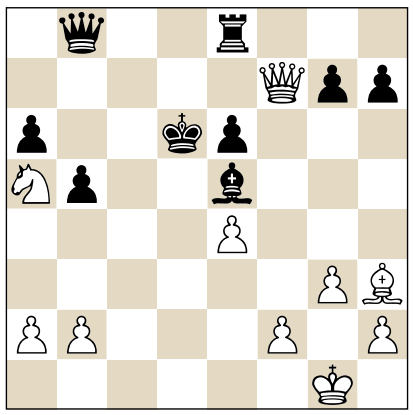
It was on this continuation that I based my calculations.

24...♗xe5 25.♖xd7 ♔xd7 26.♕xf7+ ♔d6 27.♗h3

This is all forced.

27...♖e8

If 27...♕e8, then 28.♕a7 wins, since Black cannot simultaneously defend against the unpleasant check 29.♘b7 and retain his a6/b5-pawns.



28.♘b7+

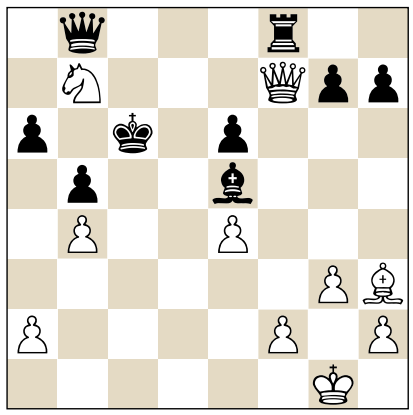
Here I was slightly taken aback. In advance it seemed to me that 28.f4 should win easily, but when I began thinking I realized that even after the simple 28...♗xb2 there is no question of mating the black king. This fact sobered me up but, as it turned out, not completely.

28...♔c6 29.b4

This was my plan B, with which I regained my belief in the correctness of things begun with my 24th move.

29...♖f8

A strong move, which in advance I underestimated.



30.♕e7

This move involved an oversight. A vindication of the preceding

ERIC VAN REEM

Levon Aronian annotates his fourth win, against Arkadij Naiditsch, freely quoting Boris Gelfand, chess philosopher Evgeny Sveshnikov and a Soviet school teacher.

searchings was 30.♘a5+ ♔b6 31.♕e7, although to go in for this one has to notice the pretty reply to 31...♕c8 – 32.♘c6!. In view of the fact that 32...♔xc6 33.♗xe6 leads to mate, or to the loss of many pieces for Black, White would regain the exchange and obtain positions similar to the game.

30...♗d6

Now the game returns to lost positions for Black. He had a miraculous saving possibility in the form of a tactical stroke in this seemingly hopeless position after 30...♗c7 31.♘c5 ♕d8 32.♕xg7 ♖xf2. I have to admit that I sometimes miss rook sacrifices with perpetual check.

31.♘a5+ There now follows another series of forced moves.

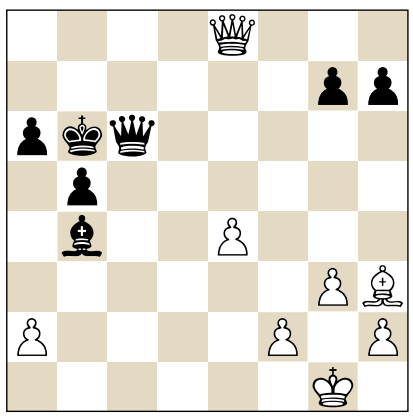
31...♔b6 32.♕xe6 ♖e8

32...♖f6 is bad because of 33.♕b3, when the black king is in a perilous state.

33.♕d7 ♗xb4 34.♘c6 ♕d6 35.♕xe8

35.♘xb4 is not possible on account of 35...♕xd7 36.♗xd7 ♖xe4, with a dangerous endgame for White.

35...♕xc6



The position has clarified and it is time to take stock. White has an extra pawn on e4, and since there is the prospect of supporting it, this gives him chances of winning. I was wanting to make the automatic move 36.♗d7, with the idea of advancing the pawn and simultaneously checking when appropriate, but after thinking for 10 minutes I was able to convince myself not to fear the exchange of queens and I turned out to be right.

36.♕b8+ I sensed that the bishop endgame should be won, but I decided that I would not lose anything by checking. After all, in any case Black's task is very difficult.

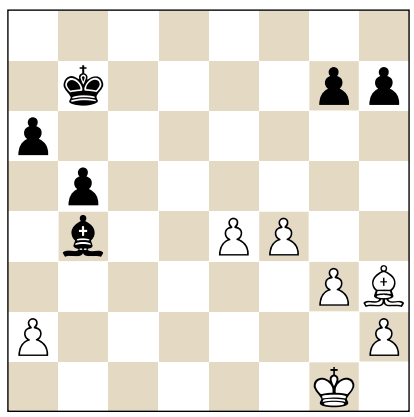
36...♕b7

If 36...♔a5 I had decided to return home with my queen by 37.♕d8+ ♔a4 38.♕d1+ ♔a5 and after 39.e5 revert to the 'plan' described above.

37.♕xb7+

A responsible decision, but objectively correct. Black must not succeed in exchanging the a2-pawn.

37...♔xb7 38.f4

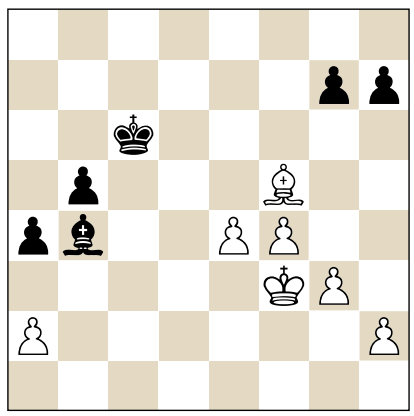


White's plan is simple: provoke h6, place his pawns on h5/g4/f4/e5, detain Black's queenside pawns on a5/b4 and advance g5. Despite the opinion of some strong players, that the position should be drawn, I would be glad to obtain it again, since in recent times I have ceased to believe in fortresses.

38...♔c6 39.♔f2 a5 40.♔f3 a4

This aggravates Black's problems and hastens the end.

41.♗f5



An important move. Now Black must declare his intentions.

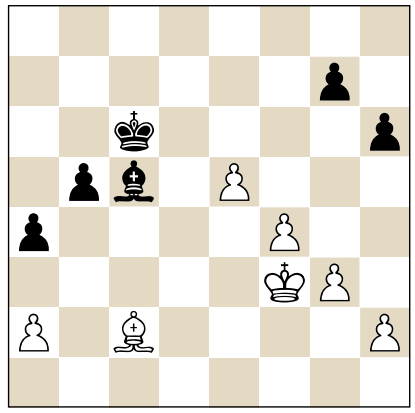
41...h6 41...g6 does not save Black because of 42.♗e6 ♗c3 43.e5 b4 44.♔e4 h5 (otherwise White creates a pair of passed pawns by g4 and f5) 45.♔d3 followed by ♗f7 and the removal of the pawns.

42.♗g6

From e8 the bishop holds everything.

42...♔d7 43.e5 ♗c5 44.♗d3 ♔c6 45.♗c2

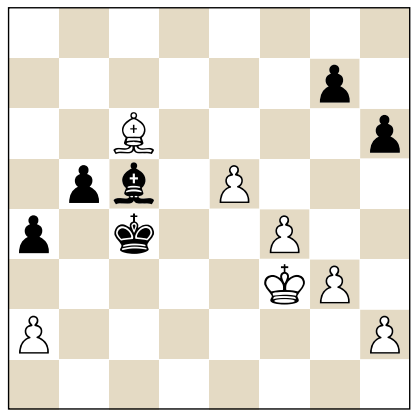
There is no particular need to rush.



45...♔d5 After the possible 45...♗g1 46.h4 ♔d5 47.h5 ♗d4 48.♗g6 b4 49.♗f7+ ♔c5 50.♔e4 although Black succeeds in exchanging his a- and b-pawns for the a-pawn, he cannot return in time with his king to e7.

46.♗e4+ This is decisive, since the white king takes up position on e4 and directs the advance of the pawns.

46...♔c4 47.♗c6 The remaining moves do not require any commentary, and they were quickly produced on the board by both players.



47...♗g1 48.h4 ♔c5 49.♗e8 ♗d4 50.h5 ♗c3 51.♔e4 ♗e1 52.g4 ♗d2 53.♔f5 a3 54.g5 b4 55.♗a4 ♔d5 56.gxh6 gxh6 57.♗b3+ ♔c5 58.♔e4

Black resigned. ■

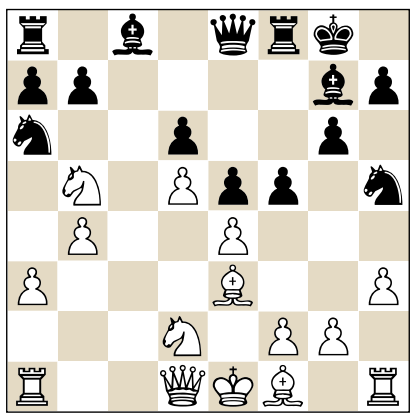
Chess Pattern Recognition

ARTHUR VAN DE OUDEWEETERING

Sometimes, two will do

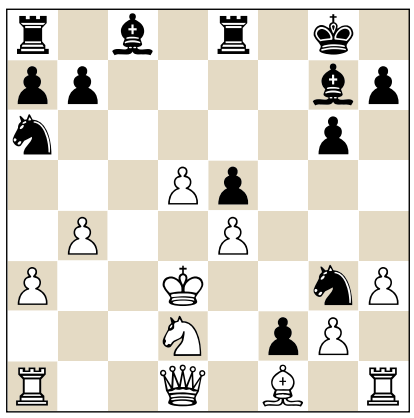
Normally speaking two minor pieces are not strong enough to battle a queen, but it's good to know that sometimes they are.

In the spectacular games Caruana-Nakamura, London 2016, and Ider-Hou Yifan, Gibraltar 2017 (featured in New In Chess 2017/1 and 2) you saw two pieces prevail over the queen. This material imbalance is not as uncommon as you might think. Here's another relatively recent example.

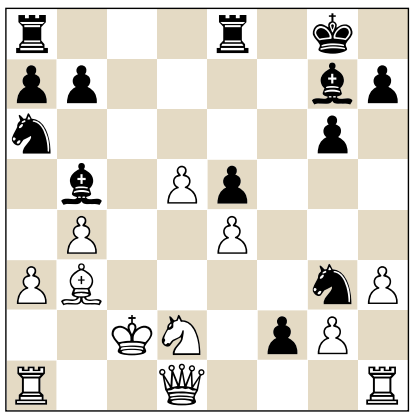


Nguyen-Jones
Baku Olympiad 2016
position after 14.♘b5

It looks as if Black's King's Indian has landed him in some early trouble. But he comes up with an inventive plan.
14...f4 15.♘xd6 fxe3!? White might have dreamt of a solid advantage, but this completely changes the character of the battle. **16.♘xe8 exf2+ 17.♔e2 ♘g3+ 18.♔d3 ♖xe8**

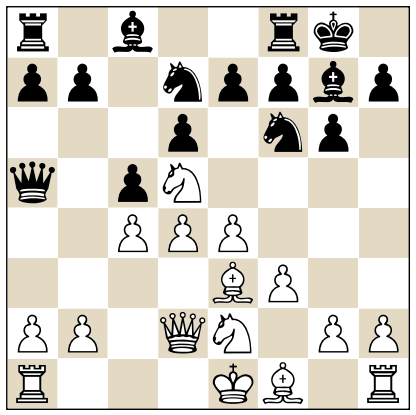


Two pieces, a hanging white rook on h1 and a potentially troublesome advanced pawn on f2. In addition, White's king is lingering in the middle of the board. Black, on the other hand, will not find it easy to activate his a6-knight.
19.♔c2 An attempt to coordinate his pieces as quickly as possible by returning some material. **19...♗d7!** Jones rightly senses it is not yet time to grab material with 19...♘xh1 20.♗b5 ♖f8 21.♕xh1, when Black has scarcely any active pieces left. **20.♗c4** The tempting 20.♕f3 ♘xh1 21.♗xa6 bxa6 22.♖xh1 already puts Black on top after 22...♖f8. **20...♗a4+ 21.♗b3 ♗b5**



22.♔b2 Although it is very natural to step out of the open c-file, this move hands over the initiative to Black. After 22.♕g4 ♘xh1 23.♖xh1 ♖f8 24.h4 f1♕ 25.♘xf1 ♗xf1 26.h5, it is Black who is material up, but now White has the active pieces. **22...♗e2 23.♕b1 ♗h6** The remaining moves must have been a great joy to play for Jones. **24.♘f3 ♔h8 25.♔a2 ♖ac8 26.♕b2 ♘xe4! 27.♖af1 ♗xf1 28.♖xf1 ♘c3+ 29.♔a1 e4 30.♕xf2 exf3 31.♕xf3 ♗g7 32.d6 ♖e2** 0-1.

Here is an older game in which the white king also gets stuck in the middle.

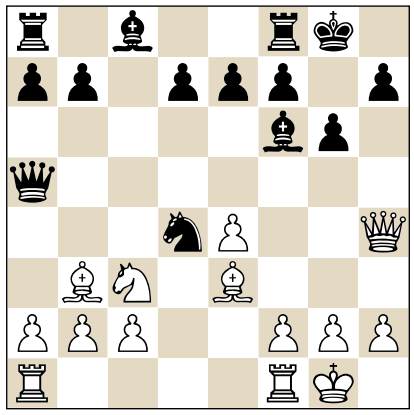


J.Nielsen-Larsen
Copenhagen 1965
position after 9.♘d5

9...♘xd5!? In his comments Larsen referred to the 'famous game Bobotsov-Tal from 1958', which had continued 8....a6 9.0-0-0 ♕a5 10.♔b1 b5 11.♘d5 ♘xd5!?. Although Larsen doubted the correctness of his sacrifice, he said he would also have played it against a stronger opponent, because he liked the courage and imagination of it. **10.♕xa5 ♘xe3 11.♕d2 cxd4** Black seems to have sufficient compensation: he has a compact position and an octopus on e3, whereas the white queen has no clear targets. **12.♘f4! ♘b6** Larsen goes for the white king and does not mention the forcing line 12...♘xf1 13.♔xf1 ♗h6, which would immediately yield Black a third piece! After 14.g3 e5 15.h4 exf4 16.h5 ♗g7 Black seems fine. **13.♘d5 ♘bxd5 14.cxd5 f5 15.♗d3 fxe4 16.♗xe4 e6 17.♖c1** And it works! 17.♔f2 was called for here, possibly after first taking on e6, when Larsen admits that there seems to be no clear attack for Black.
17...exd5 18.♖c7? ♗h6! 19.g4 Because after 19.♗d3 ♖e8 there is no proper way to meet the discovered check.

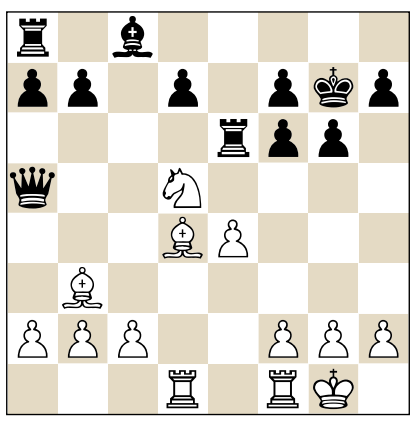
19...dxe4 20.♕xd4 ♖xf3 21.♕xe4 ♗xg4 22.♖g1 ♖af8 23.♖xg4 ♘xg4 24.♕e6+ ♔h8 25.♕xg4 ♖e8+ 26.♖e7 ♖xe7+ 27.♔d1 ♖f1+ 28.♔c2 ♖f2+ 29.♔d1 ♖d2+ 0-1.

The way Caruana's pieces attained superiority in his game against Nakamura was reminiscent of Nezhmetdinov's play in his classic game against Chernikov.



Nezhmetdinov-Chernikov
Rostov-on-Don 1962
position after 11...♗f6

12.♕xf6!! ♘e2+ 13.♘xe2 exf6 14.♘c3 ♖e8 15.♘d5 ♖e6 16.♗d4 ♔g7 17.♖ad1

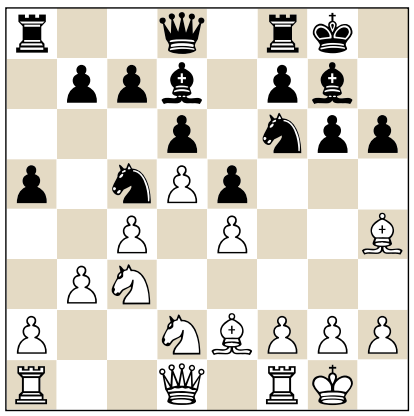


By now the forceful cooperation of White's pieces is quite obvious. The remaining moves have a perfect flow. **17...d6 18.♖d3 ♗d7 19.♖f3 ♗b5 20.♗c3 ♕d8 21.♘xf6 ♗e2 22.♘xh7+ ♔g8 23.♖h3 ♖e5 24.f4 ♗xf1 25.♔xf1 ♖c8 26.♗d4 b5 27.♘g5 ♖c7 28.♗xf7+ ♖xf7 29.♖h8+ ♔xh8 30.♘xf7+ ♔h7 31.♘xd8 ♖xe4 32.♘c6 ♖xf4+ 33.♔e2** 1-0. Truly impressive.

In compact closed positions with many pawns and pieces still on the board, two

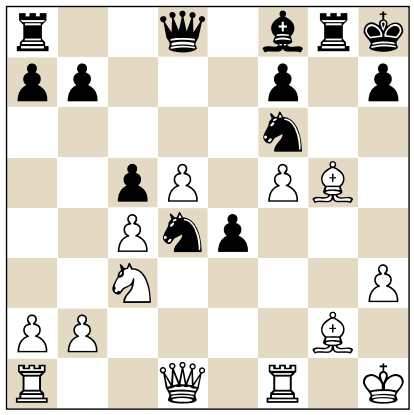
'Larsen said he would also have played the sacrifice against a stronger opponent, because he liked the courage and fantasy.'

pieces may also successfully battle a queen. Here is a lesser known idea in the King's Indian pioneered by a World Champion. A young Iranian talent repeated the idea.



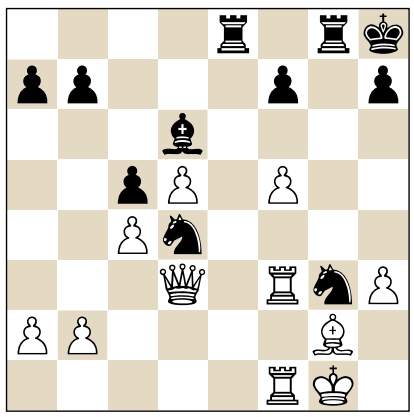
Mchedlishvili-Firouzja
Bandar-e Anzali 2016
position after 12.b3

12...♘fxe4!? 13.♗xd8 ♘xc3 14.♕e1 ♖axd8?! 14...♖fxd8 15.♘b1 ♘xe2+ 16.♕xe2 e4 has been seen more than once. In the first outing of this queen sac, a five-minute game in Munich 1994, Kramnik needlessly shed another pawn with 15.♖c1 ♘xa2 16.♖a1 ♘b4, whereupon Kasparov converted his advantage. **15.♘b1 ♘xe2+ 16.♕xe2 e4 17.♘d2 ♖de8** An instructive moment: White deliberately offers to return material, but Black refuses to give up his strong bishop, which is a difficult decision, since 17...♗xa1 18.♖xa1 f5 was probably the best opportunity to restore the material balance. **18.♖ae1 f5 19.f4 ♗d4+ 20.♔h1 ♖e7?!** 20...♘d3 seems more consistent, since it allows the d4-bishop to retreat to c5. Black is solid, although, as in the game, he lacks a clear direct plan. And in the game he lost after 41 moves. No, life is not always easy for the two pieces, but in our last example it is the player with the queen who loses his bearings.



Bilek-Gligoric
Teeside 1972
position after 22...♗f8

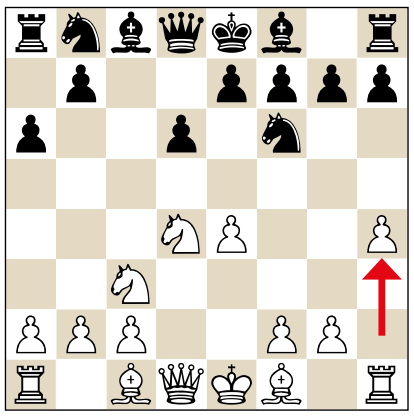
23.♘xe4 Gligoric writes in *I Play Against Pieces*: 'White falls into the trap [...] and could not have imagined that two knights would be stronger than queen and pawn.' **23...♘xe4 24.♗xd8 ♘g3+ 25.♔g1 ♖xd8 26.♖f3** The engine, which cannot always be trusted in these unbalanced positions, indicates a clear advantage for White after 26.♖e1 ♘gxf5 27.♖e4, yet somewhere around here Gligoric refused a draw offer. After the queen sac this second psychological blow may have contributed to Bilek's downfall. **26...♗d6** Remember, material is not important! **27.♕d3 ♖de8 28.♖af1**



28...♘xf1 What a pity! Now Gligoric wins back two exchanges and the game, but 28...♘de2+ 29.♔f2 ♗e5!! would have been a glorious finish, since ...♗d4+ is devastating. **29.♖xf1? ♘e2+ 30.♔h1 ♘g3+ 31.♔g1 ♘xf1 32.♔xf1 ♖g3 33.♕d1? ♖eg8 34.♕h5 ♖xg2 35.♕xf7 ♗e5 36.f6 ♗d4** 0-1 ■

Anything goes versus the Najdorf

Jeroen Bosch



6.h4!?

'As I was following the game Naroditsky-Zerebukh, I suspected a transmission error... For really no sane grandmaster would play 6.h4, right?'

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6

The Najdorf continues to be one of the most popular ways to start a chess game. The objective strength of Fischer's and Kasparov's favourite opening may explain the sheer number of replies that White has tried out on move 6. To traditional replies like 6.♗g5, 6.♗e3, 6.♗e2, 6.♗c4, 6.f4, 6.g3, 6.h3 (which in recent years has got back into the limelight), 6.f3 (to avoid 6.♗e3 ♘g4) and 6.a4, a considerable number of odd-looking moves have been added over the years.

At some point, English players like Adams, Short and Gallagher opted for the pretty decent-looking 6.♗d3. Ivanchuk went for 6.♖g1 (to prepare g2-g4) somewhere in the 1990s, which prompted me to joke that 6.♖b1 might be next. Considering what came next, I think the joke may be on me. SOS articles on 6.♕e2 and 6.♕f3 have appeared since. It is not so long ago that I wrote about Bartel's prophylactic (but odd!) 6.♘b3 – see NIC 2016/4, it's still quite popular! At Wijk aan Zee 2017, Karjakin and Carlsen played the old SOS suggestion 6.a3, which I re-investigated in an article for Yearbook 122.

I am sure that you've lost count by now, but that's 15 different replies to 5...a6! And I haven't even told you that 6.♕d3 has been played as well, and has been in my SOS-file of ideas for quite some time. And yet, in the firm knowledge that anything goes against the Najdorf – because nothing seems to promise anything – I must confess that when I was following the game Naroditsky-Zerebukh from the 2017 American Championship, I suspected a transmission error... For really no sane grandmaster would play 6.h4, right? Surely, 6.h3 had been played and the pawn had briefly touched the fourth rank. Following the game live, this seemed like a plausible explanation until Naroditsky moved his king's rook to square h3 on move 21: he really had played the audacious 6.h4! What's more, several decent players have already followed suit: Yu Yangyi, Fedoseev, and, in games with faster time-controls, Nepomniachtchi and Oparin. So, with a heavy heart, let's find out why even 6.h4 can be played against the Najdorf.

6.h4

Without delving too deeply, let's first make a few obvious observations by looking at the board:

The characteristic 6...e5 (playing in the centre in reply to a flank operation) must be the most important move to investigate. The Najdorf move 5...a6 prepares that central thrust after all, and it is not immediately obvious why 6.h4 is such a great achievement here.

And, although Najdorf players usually like to keep their queen's knight flexible, 'the classical' 6...♘c6 should be pretty decent too.

NEW IN CHESS TRAINING

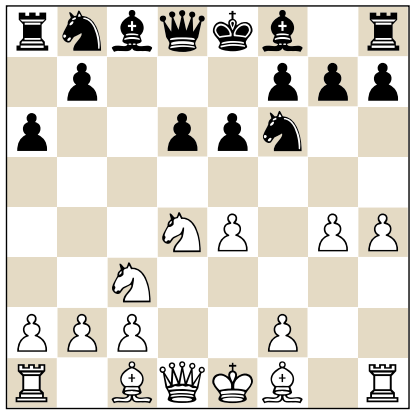
The Scheveningen set-up with 6...e6 can't be bad, but here, after 7.g4, we can see a Keres Attack coming up, which seems to give 6.h4 some (belated) sense.

Responding on the flank with 6...h5 or 6...h6 should be inferior. The latter move invites 7.f3, followed by ♗e3 and a later g4, when ...h6 provides White with a target. The first move weakens square g5 and 7.♗g5 should be very pleasant for White.

Finally, a Dragon set-up – 6...g6 – seems madness. Nothing wrong with 7.f3, preparing a Rauzer attack, but even stronger is 7.h5, when 7...♘xh5 8.g4 (8.♖xh5!?) 8...♘f6 9.g5 gives lovely compensation.

So it makes sense to investigate 6...♘c6 (Variation I) and 6...e5 (Variation II) as main lines.

■ As mentioned, after 6...e6 White goes 7.g4!.

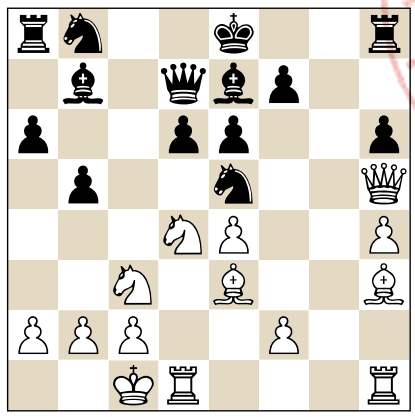


And now:

– 7...♘c6 8.g5 ♘d7 9.♗e3 ♘xd4 10.♕xd4 leads, not surprisingly, to a position that can be reached via several move orders. Black has allowed White to make sense of 6.h4, would be my verdict.

– 7...d5 8.exd5 ♘xd5 9.♘xd5?! ♕xd5 10.♖g1 e5 11.♘f3 ♕xd1+ 12.♔xd1 ♘c6 favoured Black in Krajnc-Sakaev, Stockerau 1991. Instead, a 'French' approach with 8.e5 ♘fd7 9.f4 makes more sense.

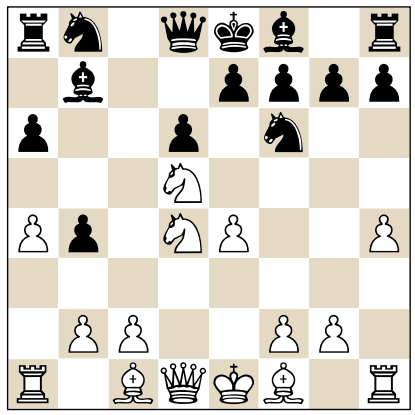
– 7...h6 8.♗g2 ♘fd7 9.♗e3 ♗e7 10.g5 ♘e5 11.gxh6 gxh6 12.♕e2 White is already clearly up for choice: 12...b5 13.0-0-0 ♗b7? 14.♕h5 ♕d7 15.♗h3, and Black resigned in Baron-Menezes, Karlsruhe 2017.



He is indeed completely busted.

■ 6...b5

It's true that 5...a6 also prepares for 6...b5, but that doesn't mean that you have to execute this immediately, since it might give White an early target: 7.a4! b4 8.♘d5 ♗b7



Here White has a choice:

– 9.♗c4 ♘bd7 10.♗g5?! e6 11.♘xf6+ ♘xf6 (11...gxf6) 12.♕e2 h6? 13.♗xf6 ♕xf6 14.♗b5+! ♔e7 (14...axb5? 15.♕xb5+ simply loses for Black) 15.♘c6+ ♗xc6 16.♗xc6 ♕xb2 17.0-0, and White was much better and won in Pacher-Gabuzyan, Mashhad 2017.

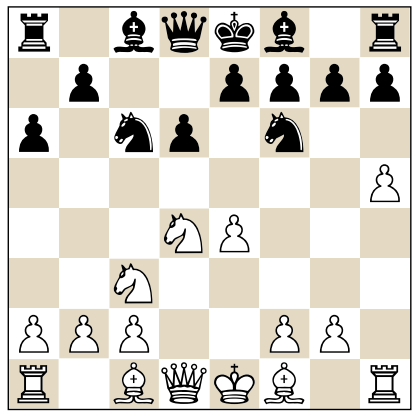
– Stronger is 9.♘xf6+ gxf6 10.♗c4!, when 10...♗xe4? is a mistake in view of 11.♗xf7+! ♔xf7 12.♕h5+ ♗g6 (12...♔g8 13.♖h3! wins) 13.♕d5+, picking up the queen's rook. This line clearly shows the dangers of an early ...b5.

Variation I

6...♘c6 7.h5!?

Instead 7.f3 e6 8.♗e3 ♕c7 9.♕d2 ♗e7 10.0-0-0 was a much more conventional approach – the 'English Attack' – in K.McDonald-Zhao, Dos Hermanas 2004.

While Carlsen's main coach went for a 'Rauzer' in the following blitz game: 7.♗g5 e6 8.♕d2 ♕b6 (stronger is 8...h6!) 9.♗e3 ♘g4 9.♘b3 ♗d7 10.0-0-0 0-0-0 11.f3 ♔b8 12.♗e3 ♕c7 13.♘a4, and White was clearly better in P.H.Nielsen-Carstensen, Wch blitz Berlin 2015.



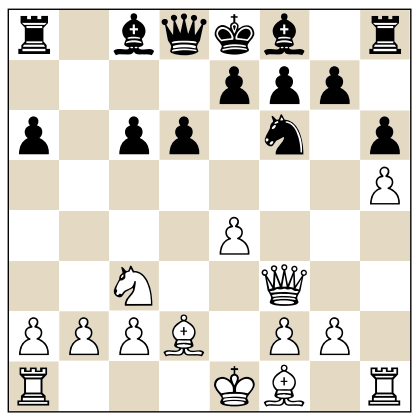
Is this post-modern chess? – not even the Hyper-moderns went this far! 7.h5 is a move that to a more classically oriented player must seem at least as shocking as say Duchamp's 'Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2' to art lovers of the early 20th century. Others might argue that once you have played A, you must also play B! Unlike our human opponents, the engines do not frown upon White's move. They acknowledge the positional threat of 8.h6! and agree that Black should now reply **7...h6**

And it's true that 7...e5 8.♘xc6 bxc6 9.h6! favours White!

8.♗e3 ♘g4 A highly appealing knight jump, more or less forcing White to take on c6.

9.♘xc6 bxc6 10.♗d2 Now the g4-knight is sort of hanging in the air, so White retreats.

10...♘f6 11.♕f3!



White is creating threats (e4-e5) and is preparing to castle queenside at the appropriate moment.

11...e5 A nice fantasy variation is 11...♗g4 12.♕e3 ♗xh5?, when White can lash out with 13.e5! dxe5 14.♖xh5! ♘xh5 15.♕f3 ♘f6 16.♕xc6+ ♘d7 17.♗xa6, and after 17...e6 18.0-0-0 White is fully developed and wins, not in post-modern style but in the attacking style of the old masters (Morphy and Anderssen).

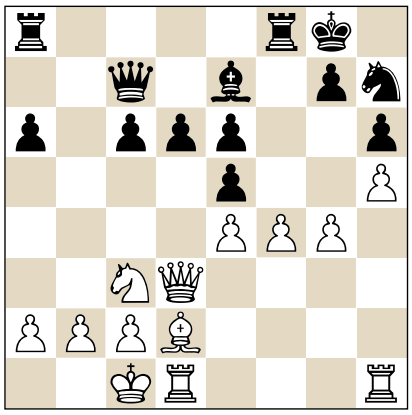
12.♗c4 ♗e6 This time White obtains good positional compensation for the pawn following 12...♗g4 13.♕g3 ♗xh5 14.f3.

13.♗xe6 fxe6 14.0-0-0 White has completed his development and definitely has a slight opening advantage. Not bad for 6.h4 and 7.h5, wouldn't you say?

14...♕c7 15.g4 A useful waiting move is 15.♔b1, intending 15...♗e7 16.♕h3!.

15...♘h7 15...d5 16.♔b1, followed by 17.g5, is an edge for White.

16.♕d3 ♗e7 17.f4 0-0

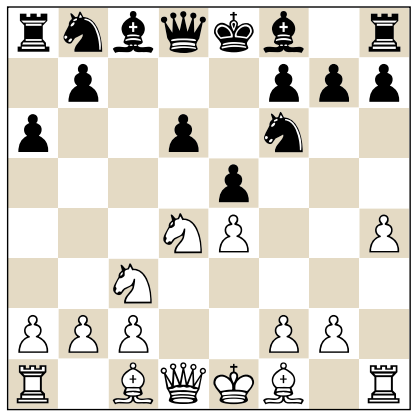


18.fxe5 White has some decent alternatives at this stage: 18.g5, intending 18...exf4 19.gxh6 gxh6 20.e5!; and 18.♘e2, when 18...d5 is met by 19.g5 hxg5 20.h6!, with a very strong attack!

18...d5 19.♖hf1 ♕xe5 20.♖xf8+ ♖xf8 21.exd5 cxd5 22.♕xa6 ♗g5, and Black had more or less sufficient compensation for the pawn in Yu Yangyi-Lu Shanglei, China 2017.

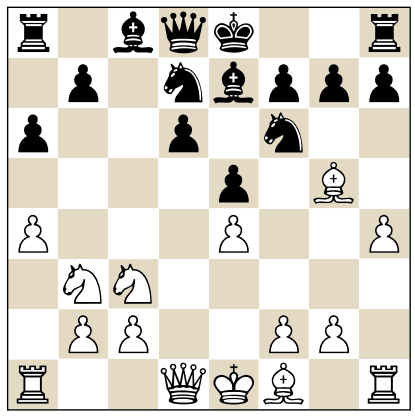
Variation II

6...e5 This was played by Zherebukh in the afore-mentioned game and is the most logical reply.

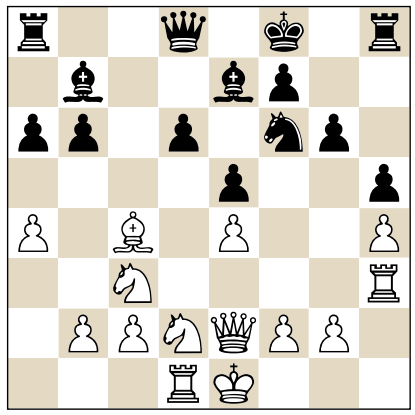


7.♘b3 ♗e6 Black is ambitious and goes for the most harmonious Najdorf set-up: ...♘bd7, ...♗e7 and ...0-0.

After the logical 7...♗e7 White should revert to 'positional play' with 8.♗g5 ♘bd7 9.a4

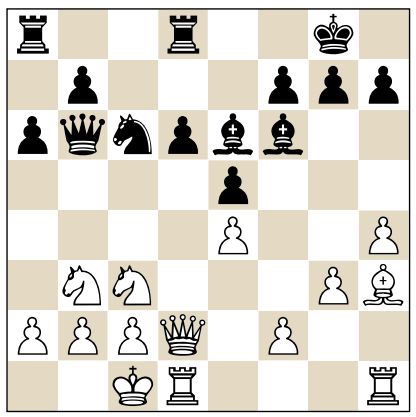


9...b6 (if now 9...h6, Kostenko-Jumabayev, Almaty 2017, then 10.♗e3) 10.♗c4 ♗b7 11.♕e2 h6 12.♗xf6 ♘xf6 13.♖d1 (13.0-0-0!?) 13...h5!? 14.♖h3!? g6 15.♘d2 (15.♔f1) 15...♔f8



16.♘f1 (going for f7 with 16.♘f3 looks strong, but as in the game, Black will play 16...b5!) 16...b5 (16...♔g7) 17.axb5 axb5 18.♗xb5 ♕a5, and Black had very decent compensation for the pawn in Nepomniachtchi-Gelfand, Zurich blitz 2017.

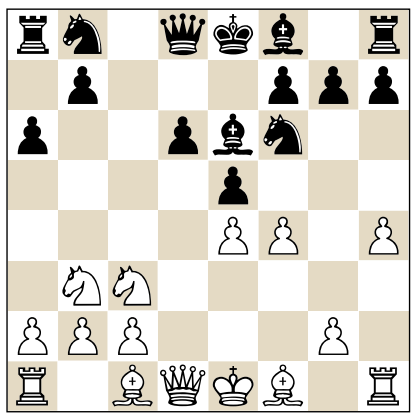
After 7...♗e7 8.♗g5 Black can also play 8...♗e6. I strongly advise you to study the following win by Vladimir Fedoseev (see his profile in the previous issue of this magazine): 9.♗xf6! ♗xf6 10.g3. The game now resembles certain modern lines from the positional Sveshnikov. White has no advantage, but his plan is easier than Black's (domination of the light squares): 10...♘c6 11.♕d2 (11.♘d5) 11...0-0 (11...a5!? 12.♗b5 0-0) 12.0-0-0 ♕b6 (12...a5, planning 13.♕xd6 ♕xd6 14.♖xd6 ♗e7 15.♖d1 a4, with excellent compensation for the pawn) 13.♗h3 ♖fd8



14.♘d5! ♗xd5 15.exd5 ♘b8 (15...♘d4) 16.♕e3! ♘d7 17.♕xb6 ♘xb6 18.♘a5, with pressure in Fedoseev-Sadzikowski, Karlsruhe 2017.

8.f4

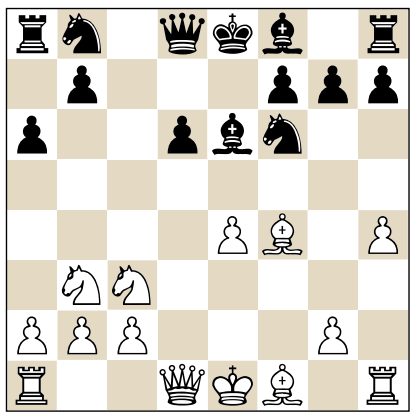
This is more or less forced, for if 8.♗g5 then Black obtains a very harmonious set-up with 8...♘bd7, and by now we really may start wondering what 6.h4 was for.



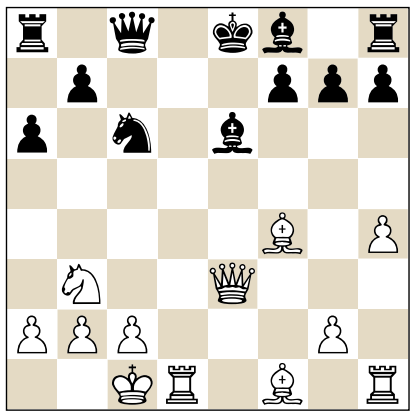
8...♘c6

Now 8...♗e7 is of course met by 9.f5! ♗xb3 (9...♗d7 10.g4 ♗c6 11.♗g2) 10.axb3 ♘c6 11.g4 d5 12.g5 ♘xe4 13.♘xe4 dxe4 14.♕xd8+ ♖xd8, when 15.c3, followed by 16.♗g2, is a nice endgame for White – two bishops!

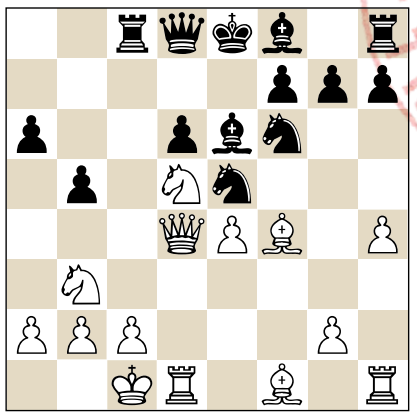
Dubious is 8...♗g4?! 9.♗e2 ♗xe2 10.♕xe2 ♘bd7 11.g4! ♘b6 12.g5 ♘fd7, Steinberg-Agbabishvili, Gibraltar 2017, and now 13.♗e3 was the simplest way to achieve an overwhelming positional advantage.
In Zurich, Svidler played 8...g6!? 9.♗e2 ♘bd7 10.g4! h5?! 11.g5 (11.f5! is also strong) 11...♘g4 12.♖f1! (threatening f4-f5) 12...exf4 13.♗xf4 ♘de5 14.♕d2 ♕c7 15.0-0-0, with a clear white edge; Oparin-Svidler, Zurich 2017.
The main alternative to the text is 8...exf4 9.♗xf4.



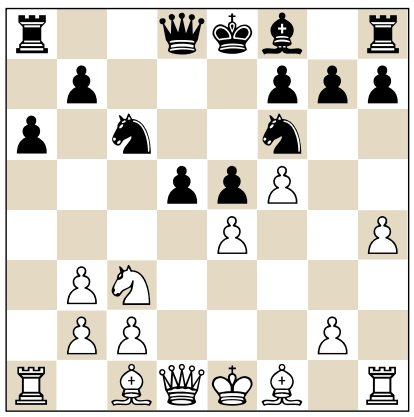
Black cannot equalize with 9...d5?! 10.exd5 ♘xd5 11.♘xd5 ♗xd5 12.♕d2 ♘c6 13.0-0-0 ♗e6 14.♕e3 ♕c8



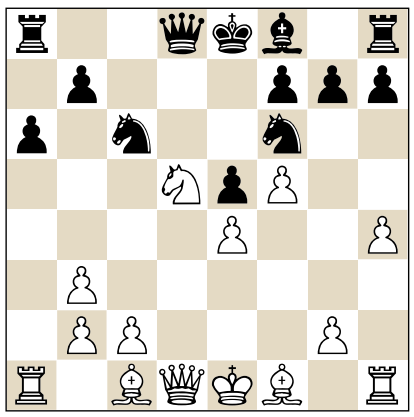
and now 15.a3 ♗e7 16.♘c5 was slightly better for White in Kobo-Drori, Budapest 2017, but even better was the energetic 15.♕g3!, and Black has huge problems trying to develop his remaining pieces: 15...♘b4 (15...g6 16.h5!) 16.♗d3 ♘xa2+ (16...♘xd3+ 17.♖xd3) 17.♔b1 ♘b4 18.♘d4, and White is just winning.
9...♘c6 10.♕d2 b5 11.0-0-0 ♘e5 12.♘d5 ♖c8 (12...♘xe4 13.♕e3 ♗xd5 14.♖xd5 ♘f6 15.♖xb5!) 13.♕d4



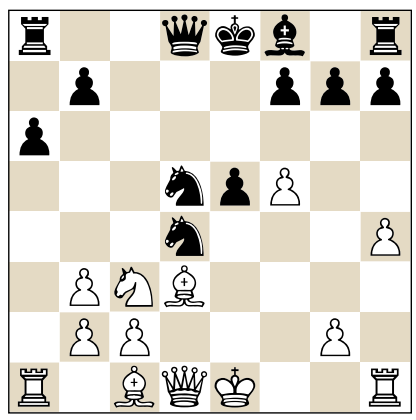
and White had a pleasant edge, which only increased after 13...♘fd7 14.♗g5! f6 15.♗f4 ♘c5 16.♗e2 ♗e7 17.♔b1 ♖c6 18.h5, Reshef-Erenberg, Budapest 2017.
9.f5 ♗xb3 After 9...♗d7 10.♗g5! is a safe positional plus, while 10.g4 forces 10...h5! 11.g5 ♘g4, when Black obtains some counterplay: 12.♗e2 a5!.
If the bishop retreats all the way, 9...♗c8 10.g4! h5 11.g5 ♘g4 is met by 12.♗e2, and Black will be too slow to gain meaningful counterplay.
10.axb3 d5!?



Black goes for a central thrust in order to avoid the positional squeeze that might result when he allows moves like ♗g5(xf6) and ♗f1-c4.
11.exd5 Naroditsky has something original in mind, but it was also possible to play 11.♘xd5! when the lines fork:



After 11...♘xd5 White has an attractive choice between 12.exd5 ♘d4 13.c3 ♘xf5 14.♕g4, with a complex middlegame that must be better for White (two bishops once again!), or a favourable endgame after 12.♕xd5 ♕xd5 13.exd5 ♘b4 14.♔d1 ♘xd5 15.♗b5+ ♔e7 16.♔e2.
The play becomes sharp following 11...♘xe4 12.♗e3!, but White seems to keep the upper hand in all lines:
– 12...♖c8 13.♗b6 ♕d6 14.♗c4.
– 12...♕d6 13.♗c4 ♘g3 14.♖h3 ♘xf5 15.♗b6 ♖c8 16.♕f3 ♘fd4 17.♕f2.
– 12...♗e7 13.♕g4! ♕xd5 14.♗c4 ♕d6 15.♕xe4.
– 12...♗c5 13.♕d3 ♗xe3 14.♕xe4.
11...♘d4 12.♗d3 ♘xd5



13.♗b5+?! An extremely original move, but unfortunately a bad one, too. Correct was 13.♗g5! ♗e7 14.♗xe7 ♘xe7 15.♕g4, and White still has every reason to believe that he is better. **13...♘xb5** Black would be slightly better after 13...axb5 14.♖xa8 ♕xa8 15.♘xd5 ♕d8. **14.♘xd5 ♘c7 15.♖a5?** Now Black will gain the upper hand. An equal endgame arises after 15.♘b6 ♕xd1+ 16.♔xd1 ♖d8+ 17.♔e2. **15...b5 16.♘xc7+ ♕xc7 17.♕f3 ♗b4+ 18.c3 0-0! 19.♖a1 e4!** And Black was better in Naroditsky-Zherebukh, St. Louis 2017.

In conclusion, it seems that anything goes against the Najdorf. After 6.h4 Black's best reply is 6...e5 (after 6...♘c6 we have seen that Yu Yangyi's 7.h5!? deserves attention). Now, after 7.♘b3, both 7...♗e7 8.♗g5 and 7...♗e6 8.f4 lead to interesting play. White is not necessarily better in either case, but we have seen that he can certainly ask Black some new and interesting questions! ■

Nakamura wins Zurich Chess Challenge third time running

Hikaru's Hat-Trick

With fine chess and a low draw rate, the sixth Zurich Chess Challenge, in memory of the great Viktor Kortchnoi, was encouraging promotion for the new classical time-control that main sponsor Oleg Skvortsov firmly believes in. Hikaru Nakamura's third consecutive victory earned the American an attractive bonus, a luxury Rolex watch. **DIRK JAN TEN GEUZENDAM** reports.

At the end of the classical music concert on the opening night of the Zurich Chess Challenge, Oleg Skvortsov briefly got up from his chair in the front row. Turning to the guests in the Ball Room of the Savoy Hotel, the main sponsor indicated that he wasn't going to give a long speech. The only thing he wanted to say to the grandmasters present was: 'Save chess. Play for a win.'

When Skvortsov sat down again, part of the audience may have felt that his plea was a tad dramatic, but those who have come to know the wealthy Muscovite knew that his exhortation was heartfelt and sincere. Skvortsov has never made a secret of his ambition to make chess a livelier spectator sport. He abhors 'grandmaster draws' and refuses to believe that anyone in his right mind has the patience or endurance to sit through a game that lasts six or seven hours. His solution is the 'new classical' time-control that he introduced last year: 45 minutes per player with a 30-second increment per move. And no more increments, or delay, as others prefer to call it, after move 40, which means that a complete game cannot last longer than roughly two hours.

When Skvortsov took stock at the end of the Challenge, he professed himself convinced that 'new classical' is the future: 'The quality of the games was much better than last year. More fighting chess, more decided games. More than 57 per cent.' And it's not only a more agreeable playing speed for the spectators in the hall. 'Watching online is also much more pleasant. You can watch one round for two hours, then do something else or have lunch and return for the second round.'

The Russian isn't the only one who is experimenting with more attractive time-controls for spectators. Last November, at the Champions Showdown in St. Louis, organized by American chess benefactor Rex Sinquefield, the 'classical' part consisted of games for which the players got one hour, with five-second increments per move.

VLADIMIR BARSKY

On the free day of the Moscow Grand Prix, Hikaru Nakamura found out what was the special prize for his third win in Zurich, when Oleg Skvortsov's wife Natalia presented him with an Oyster Deepsea Sea-Dweller Rolex watch.

The question that remains is whether the players perceive these new controls as sped-up classical games or slowed-down rapid games. Vishy Anand, who was on a roll in St. Louis and finished overall third in Zurich, found it a tough question to answer. 'I tend to think of it as rapid, but as a long rapid. If you think of a rapid, you can afford one or two nice things during the game. Maybe it feels classical for a while and then it becomes rapid. I'll put it this way: it feels like a classical game and then at some point you realize that you can no longer afford to think and then very abruptly it stops being classical. Also, in a classical you would get a second wave. That compressed period when you're in time-trouble and you can't think only lasts for a few moves. In these formats it's forever. So, you play a classical game and then suddenly you realize, oh damn, now I've got to play very fast.'

'You can watch one round for two hours, then do something else or have lunch and return for the second round.'

But all in all, the former World Champion sees these attempts as laudable. 'It's interesting that two different organizers came up with the same idea. They're experimenting a bit with the exact time, but it's interesting that both of them independently came up with it. It's fine with me. It's long enough to play a meaningful game and there were a lot of decisive games, which is a good thing, considering how many draws there seem to be in standard classical tournaments these days. Also, I think the games were pretty high quality. No games were decided by major blunders, it wasn't someone getting 30 seconds on the clock with a good or reasonable position and making some horrible blunder and just throwing it all away. Most games were decided on the board, and time

didn't seem to be a huge factor. The first impression is that it's a good experiment. It's positive and they should do it again.'

Hikaru Nakamura, the proud and happy winner in Zurich, largely agreed. 'It felt as if you had plenty of time to think. It felt as if you were playing rapid, but at the same time I don't think players were getting super low on time. If you play a normal rapid game, say 20, 25 minutes, there comes a critical moment, usually when both players have five minutes left, or a bit less... The critical moments seemed to be occurring when the players still had time, so it was a mix of rapid and classical. You could use time at the start of the game and still not be too low on the clock.'

But in the end, Nakamura expressed a clear preference for the Zurich 'new classical'. 'In St. Louis, this 60 minutes and a 5-second delay, I couldn't figure it out for the life of me. It felt too slow to be rapid. It was somewhere in-between and it didn't work that well for me. I think 45 minutes is a good control and I hope I'll get a chance to play it again.'

Still, for the moment the 'new classical' time-control is not officially recognized by FIDE and as a result the games are not rated. Shortly after the start of the ZCC, the Live Chess Ratings website 2700chess.com announced on Twitter that they had removed the event from the rapid live ratings 'as the time-control is more than the 60 min allowed for rapid games and too short for classical.' Skvortsov doesn't seem to care too much and is confident that his time-control will be used in more major events in the coming years.

NEW IN CHESS

Special guests Jan Timman and Kirsan Ilyumzhinov happily joined the post-mortem of the spectacular exhibition game between Oleg Skvortsov and Vishy Anand.

Triathlon

The 'new classical' time-control is the core of the Zurich Chess Challenge, but it's not the only time-control used. Oleg Skvortsov compares the formula of the ZCC to a triathlon. On the first night there is a regular blitz tournament that only serves as the drawing of lots. This is followed by seven rounds of 'new classical' spread over four days, where the players can earn double points for the final standings. Finally, on the last day there are seven 'blitz' rounds with reversed colours and a time-control of 10 minutes plus 5-second increments. This is another unusual time-control, which the players felt was closer to traditional rapid than blitz.

Lively appetizer

In its six years of existence, the Zurich Chess Challenge has grown into an eight-player tourney, and this seems to be the format they hope to stick to in the coming years. Seven elite GMs plus one aspiring youngster – 19-year-old Grigory Oparin this time – who qualifies from the Nutcracker tournament. This is another recent tradition – a clash between promising talents and experienced old hands – that Skvortsov has been organizing for some years now. It takes place in Moscow in December, in close cooperation with the Russian Chess Federation and the foundation of Arkady Dvorkovich, the chess-crazy first vice-prime minister of Russia.

This year's ZCC was a tribute to the late Viktor Kortchnoi. His death on June 6 last year inevitably led to initiatives to commemorate the legendary champion who had done so much for Swiss chess after his defection from the Soviet Union in 1976. Besides the elite group, there was a big Open bearing his name, and they all played together in the Zurich Congress Hall.

Next year the ZCC will move back to the Savoy Hotel, which this time only served as the home of the grandmasters and where, in the splendid Ball Room, the opening blitz tournament took place. And where Oleg Skvortsov and Vishy Anand sat down in the early afternoon of that first day for a lively appetizer. It is common knowledge that the Russian is not only an ardent chess lover, but also a fanatical player who, over the years, has privately played many more or less secret games against the world's

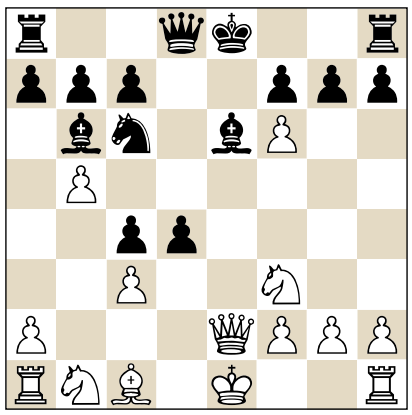
best. This was the second time, after playing Boris Gelfand with Black last year (1-0, 45), that he played an exhibition game that was transmitted live. To some, playing such a game in public may suggest a whiff of vanity, but the public eye also puts considerable extra pressure on Skvortsov, since all his moves are subjected to merciless scrutiny. To make up for the difference in playing strength – Skvortsov assesses his level to be around 2300 – Skvortsov got more time (40 minutes plus a 20-second delay against 20-20 for Anand) and the opening was negotiated beforehand. They had agreed on three variations that he could choose from and on which he had worked for several weeks, probably with the help of GMs Alexey Dreev and Sergey Shipov, with whom he has training sessions a couple of times a month. The emphasis, as always, was on sharp lines.

The game was not only followed by spectators online, but also by special guests in the room: Jan Timman and Kirsan Ilyumzhinov. The latter had come almost straight from the tumultuous FIDE Board meeting in Athens, where his powers as acting FIDE President had been taken from him and delegated to FIDE Vice-President Georgios Makropoulos. During their talks in Zurich, Skvortsov suggested to Ilyumzhinov that he move the FIDE headquarters to Zurich in response to the 'coup d'état', as the Russians see it, in the world chess body. Skvortsov had found support for this idea in Zurich, but his advice was not taken, because Ilyumzhinov probably felt he was no longer in a position to take such a decision.

But let's move on to the game, because it offered great entertainment. Facing sharp opening play, Anand had to be on his guard, and he was. He sacrificed a piece and his strategy culminated in a spectacular queen sacrifice that proved decisive when White failed to find the path to safety.

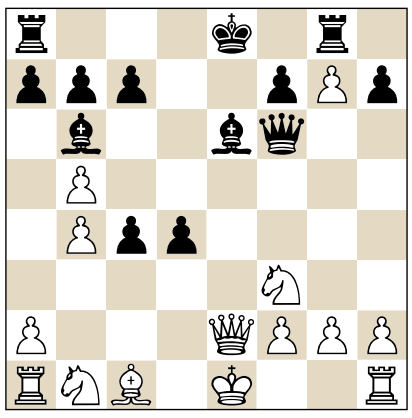
Oleg Skvortsov
Vishy Anand
Zurich 2017
Giuoco Piano

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗c5 4.c3 ♘f6 5.d4 exd4 6.b4 ♗b6 7.e5 d5 8.exf6 dxc4 9.♕e2+ ♗e6 10.b5



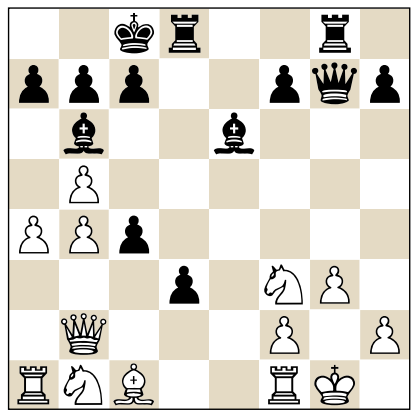
10...♘b4 Actually, this sacrifice had already been played (one move later) in a game Pershin-Mikheev, Chigorin Memorial 2011, which ended favourably for White after 10...d3 11.♕e4 ♘b4 12.0-0 g6 13.cxb4 ♕xf6 14.♗d2 ♕xa1 15.♗c3 ♗xf2+? (Black could have kept the balance with 15...♕xa2 16.♗xh8 0-0-0 17.♗f6 ♗xf2+ 18.♖xf2 ♕xb1+ 19.♖f1 ♕xb4 20.♗xd8 ♔xd8).

11.fxg7 ♖g8 12.cxb4 ♕f6

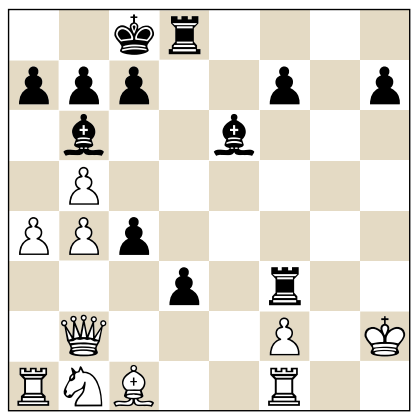


13.0-0 After the game, Jan Timman suggested 13.a4, providing the line 13...♕xg7 14.♕e5 ♕xg2 15.♖g1 ♕xg1+ 16.♘xg1 ♖xg1+ 17.♔d2 c3+ 18.♔d3 ♖xc1 19.a5 c2 20.axb6 ♖xb1 21.♔xc2 ♖xa1 22.♕h8+ ♔e7 23.♕xa8 ♗f5+, and the chances should be equal.

13...♕xg7 14.g3 0-0-0 15.a4 d3 16.♕b2



16...♕xg3+
Wow. How nice.
17.hxg3 ♖xg3+ 18.♔h2 ♖xf3



19.♗g5? This loses. In the postmortem, Skvortsov suggested 19.♔g2, which indeed proves to be good enough for equality after 19...♖f5 20.♖g1 c3 21.♘xc3 d2 22.♕xd2 ♖xd2 23.♗xd2 ♖xf2+ 24.♔g3 ♖xd2 25.♖gd1. And he admitted to have missed 'the long move' 19.♕g7, which also holds: 19...♖h3+ 20.♔g2 ♗d4 21.♕g5 f6 22.♕g7 ♖h4 23.♔g3 ♖h3+ 24.♔g2.

19...♗d4 20.♕d2 ♖g8 21.♖a3 h6 22.♖g1 ♖h3+ 23.♔g2 ♖xg5+,
and White resigned, because he will be mated after 24.♔f1 ♖xg1+ 25.♔xg1 ♗d5.

Hikaru Nakamura returned to Zurich as the winner of the previous two editions, but it was unclear what he could expect, particularly as there was very little time between the US Championship, which had ended disappointingly for him, and his trip to Europe where, to make it even more challenging, the play would start at 5 pm on two days and at 12.30 on the other days. 'I was certainly

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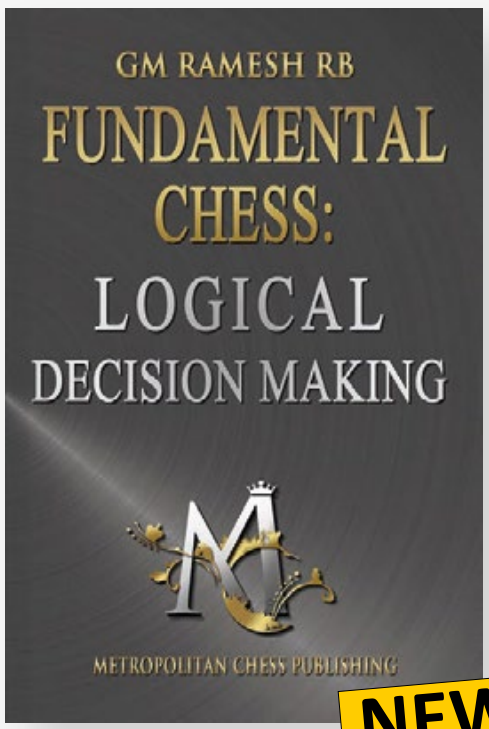

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determined and motivated after what happened at the US Championship, but it was still quite difficult. For most of the tournament except for the last day, I pretty much slept till right before the round. For the morning rounds I woke up 10-15 minutes before the start.'

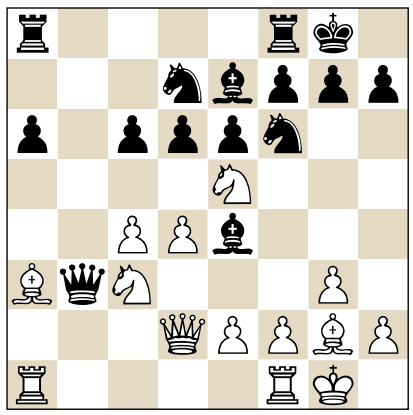
Despite this handicap, his third win in Zurich was probably his best performance here so far. 'Yes, this time it was a lot smoother. I was pretty happy with my play overall. I achieved close to the maximum score. With the exception of my loss against Peter (Svidler), I wasn't in serious danger for the most part.' To which he added with a laugh: 'So maybe I should consider doing that in the future. Wake up just before the game.'

Trusting his blitz qualities, Nakamura's feeling at the start of the 'new classical' part had been that as long as he managed to limit any possible damage there to the minimum, he could repair that damage on the final day in the blitz. But there was no damage, as at the outset of the last day he was in the shared lead with Ian Nepomniachtchi. And, indeed, he duly won the final blitz with 5 out of 7.

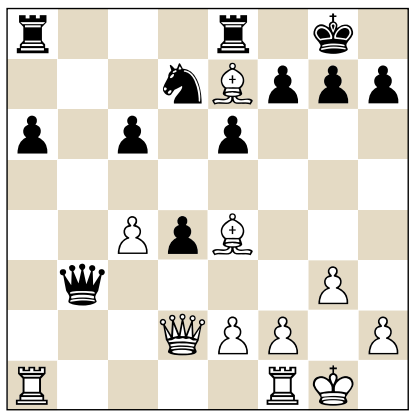
It continues to be an amazing experience to watch the American play blitz: lightning-fast moves, always keeping the game going, always on the lookout for chances... Just play through the moves of the following game, preferably at some speed – since it only lasted minutes – and imagine that you're Grigory Oparin (or Nakamura, of course).

Hikaru Nakamura
Grigory Oparin
Zurich Blitz 2017 (2)
Réti Opening

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.g3 b5 3.♗g2 ♗b7 4.♘a3 a6 5.c4 b4 6.♘c2 e6 7.0-0 ♗e7 8.d4 ♗e4 9.a3 bxa3 10.b3 0-0 11.♗xa3 d6 12.♘e3 c6 13.♕d2 ♘bd7 14.♘d1 ♕b6 15.♘c3 ♕xb3 16.♘e5



16...dxe5?
16...♘xe5 or 16...♗xg2 had to be played.
17.♗xe7 exd4?
The only way to stay in the game was 17...♗xg2 18.♖fb1 ♕xc4 19.♖b4 ♕xb4 20.♗xb4 c5.
18.♘xe4 ♘xe4 19.♗xe4 ♖fe8



20.♗xc6 ♖a7 21.♕xd4 1-0.

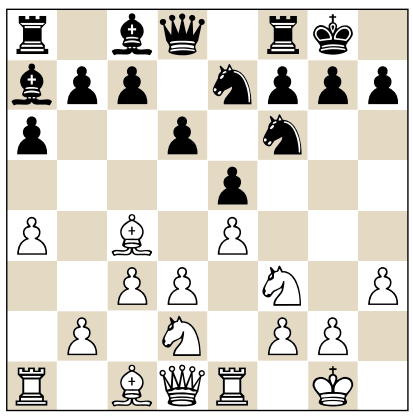
An extra motivation for Nakamura to try and win for the third time, was Oleg Skvortsov's promise that it would earn him a special gift. The American had no idea what it was, but admitted that he had been sufficiently intrigued. He found out what it was on the free day of the FIDE Grand Prix in Moscow, where he travelled next. Skvortsov's wife Natalia presented him with a Rolex watch, an Oyster Deepsea Sea-Dweller, that will allow him to play chess to a depth of 3900 metres.

The 'new classical' game that Nakamura was happiest about, was the one against Oparin. 'I felt I played really well from start to finish. Just got a good position with Black and solidly outplayed him.'

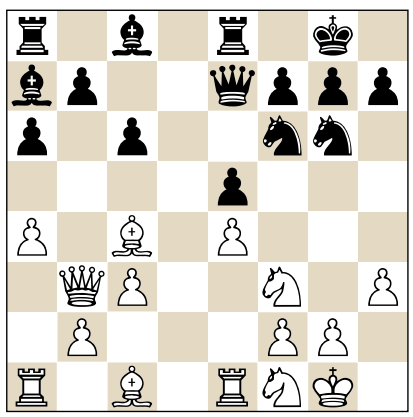
NOTES BY
Hikaru Nakamura

Grigory Oparin
Hikaru Nakamura
Zurich 2017 (2)
Giuoco Piano

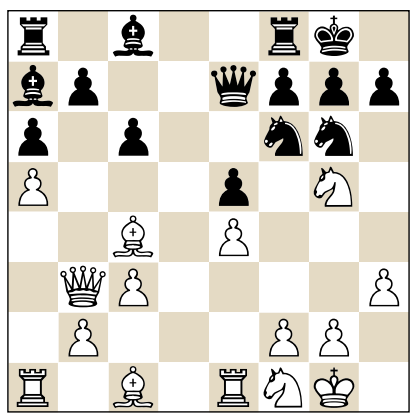
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗c5 4.c3 ♘f6 5.d3 d6 6.0-0 a6 7.a4 0-0 8.♖e1 ♗a7 9.h3 ♘e7 10.♘bd2



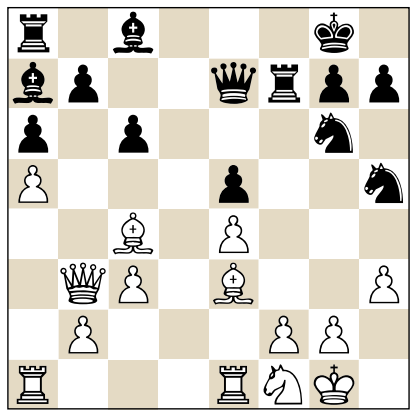
10...♘g6
Another possibility here is 10...c6!?, and now, for instance, 11.b4 ♘g6 12.d4 exd4 13.cxd4 d5 14.exd5 ♘xd5 15.♕b3 ♗e6 16.b5 axb5 17.axb5 ♘df4 18.♗xe6 ♘xe6 19.♗a3 ♘xd4 20.♘xd4 ♗xd4 21.♖ad1 ♖e8 22.♘e4 ♕b6, and Black was much better in Karjakin-Leko from the FIDE World Blitz Championship in Doha 2016.
11.d4 ♖e8!?
A new try. After 11...c6 12.♗f1 a5 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♕c2 ♗e6 15.♘c4 ♕c7 16.b4 axb4 17.cxb4 White had a slight pull in Carlsen-Karjakin from the World Championship match in New York 2016.
12.♕b3 ♕e7 13.♘f1 c6 14.dxe5 dxe5



15.♘g5?! A reasonable move, but there isn't a specific threat. Such moves really don't make a whole lot of sense without a concrete plan in mind.
15...♖f8 16.a5



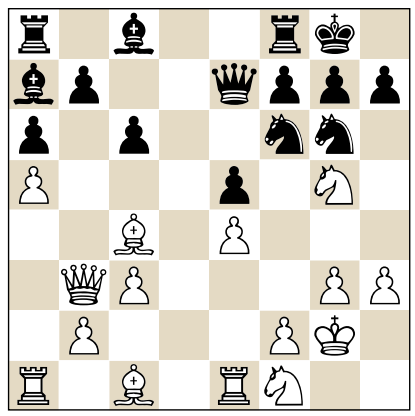
16...♘h4!?
Trying to mix things up.
Instead, 16...h6 17.♘f3 ♘e8 18.♗e3 ♘d6 is completely fine, too, but I wanted something a bit more imbalanced.
The best move was 16...♘h5!, but it's a hard one to play in a game of rapid chess: 17.♘xf7 ♖xf7 18.♗e3 (after 18.♗xf7+ ♕xf7 19.♕xf7+ ♔xf7 20.♗e3 Black has two pieces for the rook, but the advantage seems minimal, considering the pawn structure)



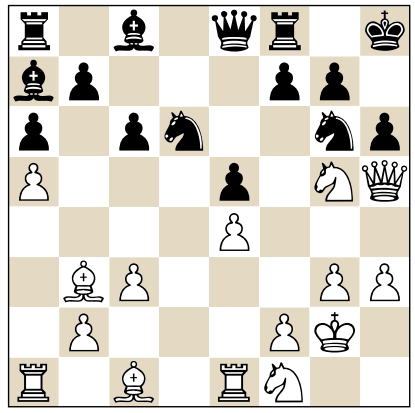
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

18...♘h8!!. I had completely missed this great defensive idea that the computer sees instantly: 19.♗xa7 ♖xa7 20.♘e3 g6 21.♖ad1 ♖a8 22.♖d2 (22.♕b6? is bad because of 22...♗e6) 22...♔g7 23.♗xf7 ♘xf7. Here Black is much better, and there will be a kingside attack coming soon with ...♘f4 and ...♕g5 ideas.

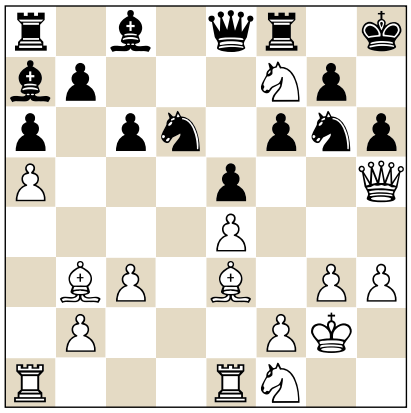
17.g3 ♘g6 18.♔g2



18...♘e8 After 18...h6 19.♘f3 ♕d7 20.♘g1 the position is still very solid, despite the weird arrangement of the white knights, and after ♗e3 on the next move everything will remain balanced.
19.♕c2 ♘d6 20.♗b3 ♔h8
Side-stepping the long diagonal while planning to play ...f5 at some point soon.
21.♕e2 h6 22.♕h5 ♕e8



23.♗e3
Here White had 23.♔g1!, an utter computer move that no human would ever play, but somehow it seems to be the glue that holds the position together: 23...f6 (after 23...f5?! 24.♗e3 ♗xe3 25.♖xe3 ♘xe4 26.♘xe4 fxe4 27.♘d2 ♗f5 28.♘xe4 ♖d8 29.♖d1 White has a slight advantage due to his better pawn structure) 24.♘f3 ♘f4 25.♕xe8 ♘xh3+ 26.♔g2 ♖xe8 27.♗e3 ♗xe3 28.♖xe3 ♘g5 29.♘xg5 fxg5 30.♖d1 ♗e6 31.♖xd6 ♗xb3 32.♘d2 ♗e6 33.♘f3 ♗c4 34.♘d2, and despite being a pawn down, White has just enough compensation to maintain equality.
23...f6 24.♘f7+

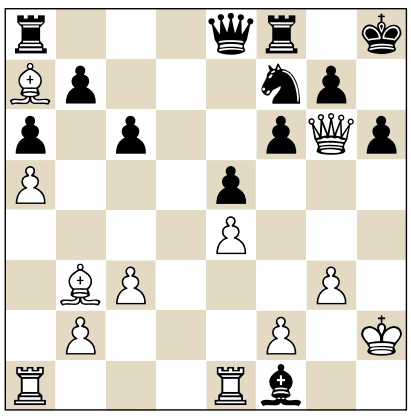


24...♘xf7?! Clearly stronger was 24...♔h7!, when, after 25.♗xh6 (25.♘xh6 runs into 25...♘f4+, picking up the queen) 25...♘xf7 26.♗e3+ ♘h6, White is simply down a piece.

25.♕xg6 ♗xh3+

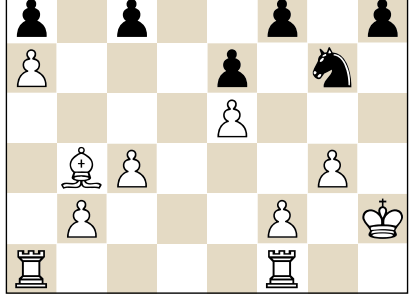
When I played 24...♘xf7, I simply saw this position after 25...♗xh3+ and assumed it had to be winning.

26.♔h2 ♗xf1 27.♗xa7



27...♘g5 After 27...♖xa7 28.♖xf1 ♖a8 29.♖fd1 ♕e7 30.♗xf7 ♖xf7 31.♖d2 ♖ff8 32.♖ad1 ♖ad8 33.♖xd8 ♖xd8 34.♖xd8+ ♕xd8 35.♕f7 ♕c8 Black is a pawn up, but it's hard to believe that, with correct play, this isn't a draw.

28.♕xe8 ♖fxe8 29.♖xf1 ♖xa7



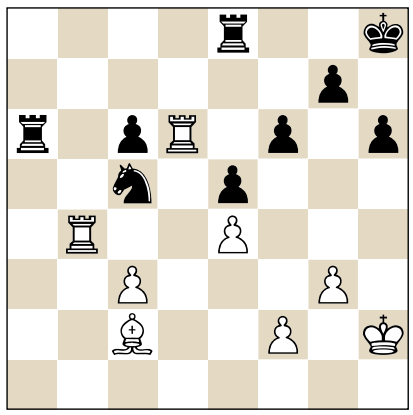
30.♖ad1!

Better than 30.f3 ♖aa8 31.♖ad1 ♖ad8 32.♔g2 g6, when Black is close to winning, since White will be unable to prevent the simple ...♔g7-f8-e7, followed by rook exchanges and a technically winning knight versus bishop endgame.

30...b6

Avoiding 30...♘xe4 31.♗c2! ♘g5 32.♗g6 ♖f8 33.♖d7, and suddenly White has tremendous counterplay and isn't worse at all.

31.axb6 ♖b7 32.♗c2 a5 33.♖d6 ♖xb6 34.b3 ♘e6 35.♖b1 ♘c5 36.b4 axb4 37.♖xb4 ♖a6



38.♖c4?

The losing move. After 38.♗d1 ♖a3 39.♖c4 ♘b7 40.♖d7 ♘a5 41.♖a4 White is still marginally worse, but with some good defensive moves he should hold.

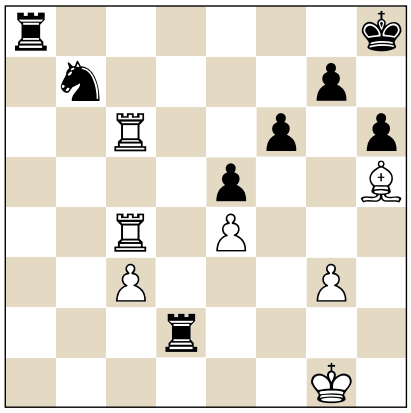
38...♖a2 39.♗d1 ♘b7 40.♖dxc6 ♖xf2+ 41.♔g1 ♖d2 42.♗h5 ♖a8

NEW IN CHESS

Three-time ZCC winner Hikaru Nakamura sees the merits of the 'new classical' time-control: 'It is a mix of rapid and classical. You can use time at the start of the game and still not be too low on the clock.'

Zurich 2017 New Classical — **cat. XIX**

					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		TPR
1	Hikaru Nakamura	IGM	USA	2793	*	1	½	½	0	1	1	1	5	2867
2	Ian Nepomniachtchi	IGM	RUS	2751	0	*	1	½	½	1	1	1	5	2873
3	Vishy Anand	IGM	IND	2786	½	0	*	0	1	1	1	1	4½	2812
4	Vladimir Kramnik	IGM	RUS	2811	½	½	1	*	½	½	½	½	4	2756
5	Peter Svidler	IGM	RUS	2747	1	½	0	½	*	½	½	1	4	2765
6	Boris Gelfand	IGM	ISR	2724	0	0	0	½	½	*	1	½	2½	2617
7	Yannick Pelletier	IGM	SUI	2541	0	0	0	½	½	0	*	½	1½	2515
8	Grigory Oparin	IGM	RUS	2604	0	0	0	½	0	½	½	*	1½	2506



Threatening mate!

43.♖c8+ ♖xc8 44.♖xc8+ ♔h7

After the rook exchange the rest is a simple matter of technique due to White's three isolated pawns.

45.♗g4 ♘d6 46.♖c6 ♔g6 47.♗f3 ♘f7 48.c4 ♘g5 49.♗g2 ♔h5 50.c5 ♔g4 51.♖a6 ♖c2 52.c6 ♔xg3 53.♖a3+ ♔f4 54.♖a6 h5

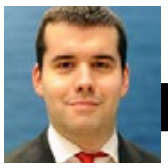
White resigned.

■ ■ ■

Ian Nepomniachtchi finished second overall, because he ran out of steam on the afternoon of the final day and could no longer keep up with Nakamura. 'Surprisingly, in both the blitz games I won I was never better, not against Yannick (Pelletier) and not against Vladimir (Kramnik). Against Vladimir I even managed to convert rook and bishop against rook, which is pure luck. On the other hand, I drew against Peter (Svidler), Boris (Gelfand) and Vishy (Anand), where on a good day I would have scored three out of three from these positions.' Nepomniachtchi felt that the 10-minute 'blitz' games with a 5-second delay were closer to rapid than traditional blitz and that seven such rounds were really taxing.

But the real reason why he did not finish first was his loss against Nakamura in the 'new classical', which obviously made all the difference. His strategy was not to waste time and not to think too much without reason, as he put it. In a couple of games, including that against his main rival, this strategy backfired, when some rash decisions turned out to be very expensive.

His best game, in his eyes, was his 'new classical' win against Gelfand.



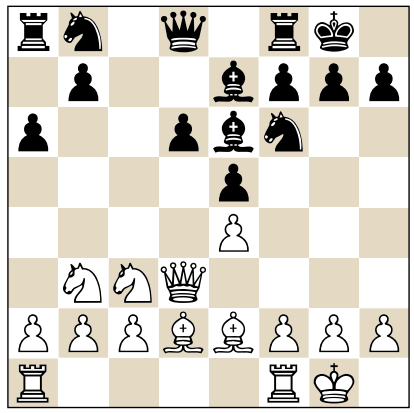
NOTES BY
Ian Nepomniachtchi

Ian Nepomniachtchi
Boris Gelfand
Zurich 2017 (4)
Sicilian Defence, Najdorf Variation

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗e2

A few days earlier, in the blitz tournament, I tried 6.h4 against Boris Abramovich, but for a classical game this move (even though a 'new' one) seems a bit too eccentric.

6...e5 7.♘b3 ♗e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♕d3 ♗e6 10.♗d2



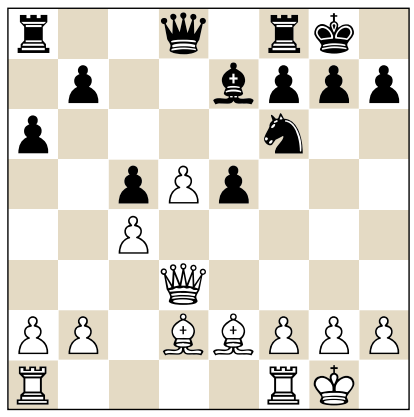
This move was introduced into grandmaster practice by two well-known Chinese colleagues – Li Chao and Wang Yue.

10...♘bd7 One of the most natural replies, although Black has several options. For example, Grischuk played 10...a5 here.

11.♘d5 ♗xd5 12.exd5 ♘c5

This exchange leads to one of the typical structures and prevents White from establishing his knight on a5.

13.♘xc5 dxc5 14.c4±



Celeb 64

John Henderson

Vitali & Wladimir Klitschko

In late April, a crowd of 90,000 at London's Wembley Stadium witnessed one of the all-time great heavyweight showdowns for the world boxing title, as British challenger Anthony Joshua ended the long reign of Ukrainian Wladimir Klitschko. It was a brutal, seesawing, enthralling fight that, wrote Gareth Davies, the *Daily Mirror*'s chief boxing correspondent, 'turned into a boxing chess match for the ages'.

While it may seem weird to combine brain and brawn, it's a very apt analogy here, as both title combatants, Joshua and none more so than now former champion Klitschko, love to play chess. Wladimir and his older brother Vitali, also a former heavyweight champion, are big aficionados of the game, and can count on the friendship and support of both Garry Kasparov and Vladimir Kramnik, with both ex-World Chess Champions seen ringside during several bouts.

This seems to be a reciprocal arrangement, because the Klitschkos, two brainy guys with PhDs – nicknamed 'Dr. Ironfist' (Vitali) and 'Dr. Steelhammer' (Wladimir) – who just happen to be somewhat ruthless fighting machines in the ring, have also turned up to many elite chess tournaments and World Championship matches to show their support for the game they both love.

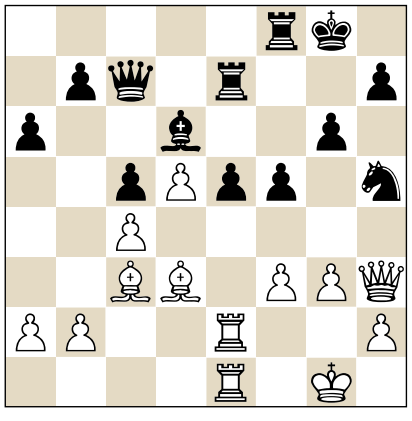
Rumour has it that there's an intense sibling rivalry between the two pugilists – though not in the ring, but over the board! ■

The engines are delighted with White's position: a protected passed pawn, the centre, and the two bishops into the bargain. In my view, it is indeed easier for White to play, but I would not venture to call this a large advantage.

14...♕c7 15.♖ae1 ♗d6 16.♕h3 ♖fe8

16...e4 17.f4 sets Black an unpleasant choice: open lines for the bishops and rooks, or allow a pawn advance.

17.♗c3 g6 18.♗d3 ♘h5 19.g3 ♖e7 20.♖e2 ♖f8 21.♖fe1 f5 22.f3

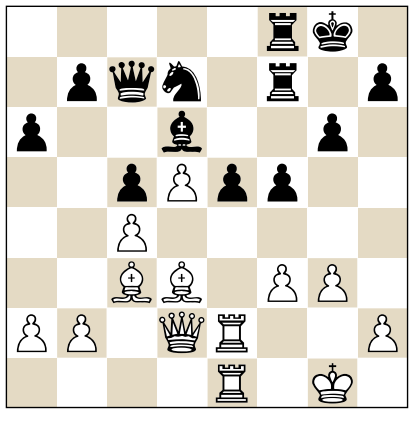


Visually, Black has made enormous progress, but this impression is deceptive. The further advance of the e- and f-pawns is extremely difficult, and in time it will become difficult to maintain the tension in the centre.

22...♘f6 23.♕h4 ♘d7 24.♕g5

I did not see how to extract any benefit from the queen's position on the kingside, and it seemed logical to transfer it to its optimal square d2.

24...♖ef7 25.♕d2

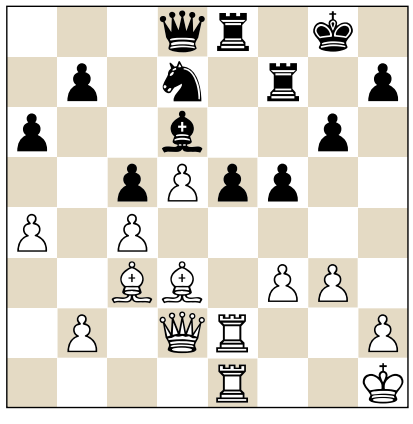


25...♕d8?!

Whereas many of Black's moves can be shuffled like cards in a pack, I would draw attention to this one. Gelfand had in mind an active plan on the kingside, but it was important to secure the situation on the queenside by advancing ...b5 and ...b4.

26.♔h1 ♖e8 27.a4

It transpires that with the queen on d2 the counter advance ...a6-a5 is not possible, and the white bishop aims for a4, disrupting the coordination of the black pieces.



27...h5?

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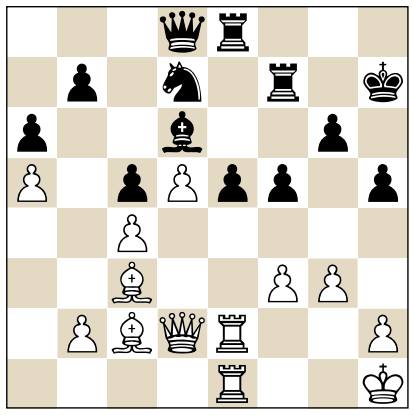
Continuing the faulty plan. Black's desire to expand his presence on the kingside is understandable, but the threat of g3-g4 is becoming more and more real.

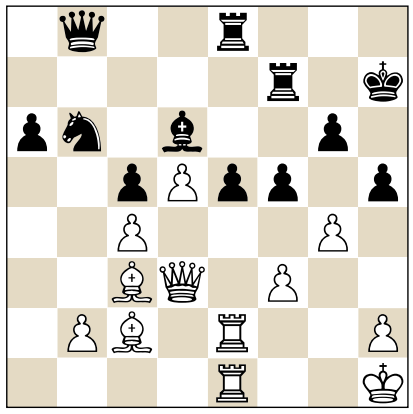
28.a5 ♔h7 29.♗c2



White has achieved an optimal set-up. I did not even try to prevent the flank activity: any opening of the game is to my advantage. You don't look a gift horse in the mouth ☺.

29...b5 Boris tries to prevent the bishop to go to a4, but now the black pieces lose their compactness and coordination and are unable to come to the aid of their king.

30.axb6 ♘xb6 31.♕d3 ♕b8 32.g4



After the weakening of the g6-point the light-squared bishop acquired enormous potential energy, which is now transformed into kinetic energy.

32...♘d7 33.gxf5 gxf5

33...♖xf5 34.♖g2.

34.f4 The queen reaches h3, after which, as they say, mate is not far off.

34...e4 35.♕h3 ♔h6 36.♖g2 ♗xf4 37.♗d1

Black resigned.

■ ■ ■

For a multitude of reasons, Vishy Anand was one of the clear favourites, but the Indian had to settle for third place, mainly because of a shaky start in the 'new classical'. But once he found his stride, the moves seemed to flow from his fingers, and he finished with three-and-a-half points out of his last four games, which included lovely wins against Gelfand and Svidler. When Anand plays chess like this, following his games is pure joy and an aesthetic experience. Smiling broadly, Anand admitted that he had enjoyed them as well: 'I'm afraid it's something that just happens. If I could control it, I certainly would! It seems to just happen sometimes, and you cannot say why. It's nice when you feel that your hands are playing, and not your head, and this time I had that feeling.'

'When Anand plays chess like this, following his games is pure joy and an aesthetic experience.'

And when you feel your hands are playing, it goes like this:

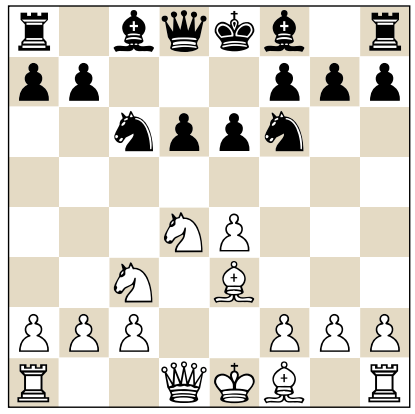
NOTES BY
Vishy Anand

Vishy Anand
Peter Svidler
Zurich 2017 (6)
Sicilian, Scheveningen Variation

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 d6

This system caught me slightly off guard, so I started thinking about what I should go for.

6.♗e3 ♘f6



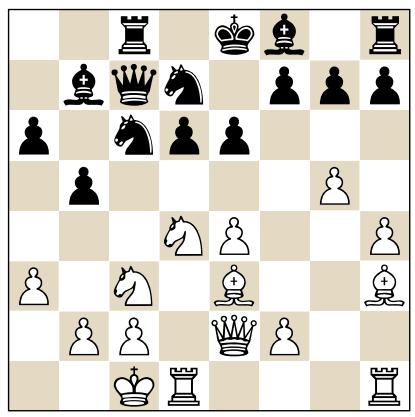
7.♕e2

I considered 7.f4 for a bit and then remembered the offbeat 7.♕e2.

7...a6 8.0-0-0 ♕c7 9.g4 b5 10.g5 ♘d7 11.h4

I was trying to get back to a Najdorf, but a3 and f4 is more common.

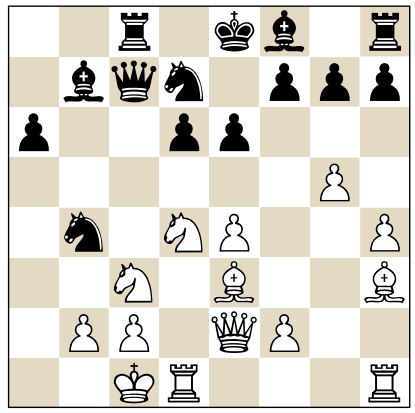
11...♗b7 12.a3 ♖c8 13.♗h3



13...b4

After 13...♘ce5, 14.♘xe6 fxe6 15.♗xe6 is promising for White.

14.axb4 ♘xb4



15.♘xe6

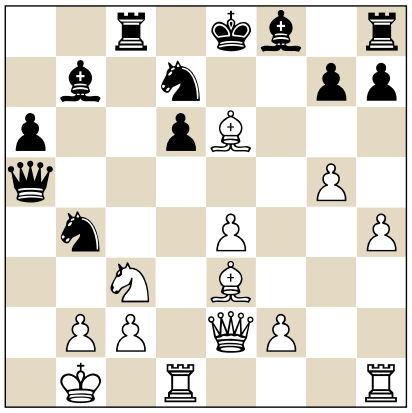
Here, too, this move didn't really feel like a sacrifice, since it is clear that White's bishop on e6 not only keeps Black's king stuck on e8, but also potentially defends White (the a2-square).

Zurich 2017 Blitz **cat. XIX**

					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		TPR
1	**Hikaru Nakamura**	IGM	USA	2793	*	½	½	½	½	1	1	1	5	2867
2	**Vishy Anand**	IGM	IND	2786	½	*	½	½	1	½	½	1	4½	2812
3	**Ian Nepomniachtchi**	IGM	RUS	2751	½	½	*	½	½	1	0	1	4	2765
4	**Peter Svidler**	IGM	RUS	2747	½	½	½	*	½	0	1	1	4	2765
5	**Boris Gelfand**	IGM	ISR	2724	½	0	½	½	*	1	½	1	4	2769
6	**Vladimir Kramnik**	IGM	RUS	2811	0	½	0	1	0	*	1	½	3	2656
7	**Grigory Oparin**	IGM	RUS	2604	0	½	1	0	½	0	*	½	2½	2634
8	**Yannick Pelletier**	IGM	SUI	2541	0	0	0	0	0	½	½	*	1	2436

The computer is happy with 15.♔b1 and thinks that White is better after 15...♕c4 (alternatively, 15...♘c5 16.♕c4 ♕a5 17.♘b3 ♘xb3 18.♕xb3 is huge for White).

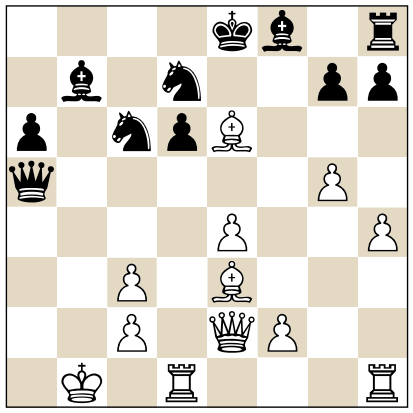
15...fxe6 16.♗xe6 ♕a5 17.♔b1



17...♖xc3

Peter spent a lot of time trying to make 17...d5 work and probably should have tried it anyway. But White has 18.♗d4 (18.exd5 won't yield White anything: 18...♖xc3 19.bxc3 ♕a2+ 20.♔c1 ♘e5!. Surprisingly, White cannot make the discovered check work: 21.♗d4 – 21.♗b6 ♗d6! 22.♖h3 doesn't give White an advantage either – 21...♘c4 22.♗f7+, and White has to take the draw after 22...♔d8! 23.cxb4 ♕a3+ 24.♔b1 ♕xb4+ 25.♔c1 ♕a3+) 18...♗d6 (18...♔d8 19.♖h3) 19.♕g4!, with a large advantage.

18.bxc3 ♘c6

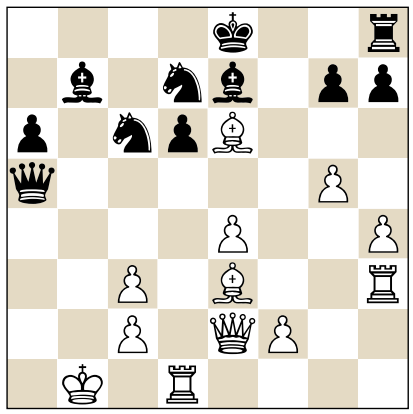


19.♖h3

The alternative was 19.f4 ♘c5 20.♗xc5 ♕xc5, and now the manoeuvre 21.♖h3! ♔d8 22.♖hd3 ♔c7 23.♖d5! is important (23.e5? dxe5 24.♖d7+ ♔b8 only frees Black's bishop on f8) 23...♕b6+ 24.♔a2 ♘d8 25.♕c4+ ♕c6 26.♖5d4, and White's position is to be preferred.

19...♗e7

If 19...♘c5, 20.♗xc5 ♕xc5 21.e5 would have been the point: 21...♘xe5 22.♖e3!.



20.♗d4? This is just absurd. I cannot explain why I didn't go 20.f4, when after 20...♘c5 21.♗xc5 ♕xc5 22.♖hd3 it is harder to run away via d8, since Black has played ...♗e7.

20...♘c5 21.♗xc5 21.♗xg7 ♘xe6 22.♗xh8 ♘f4 23.♕g4 ♘xh3 24.♕xh3 ♕b6+ 25.♔c1 ♕xf2 is fine for Black.

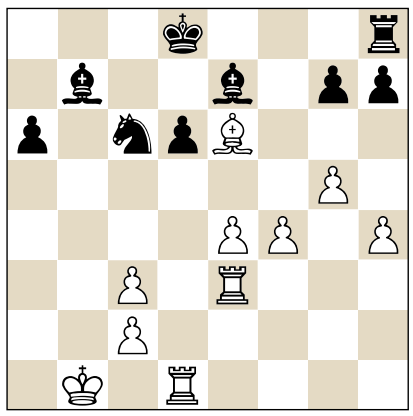
21...♕xc5

And here I couldn't see an alternative to f4, especially with ...♖f8 coming.

22.f4 ♔d8 23.♕e3

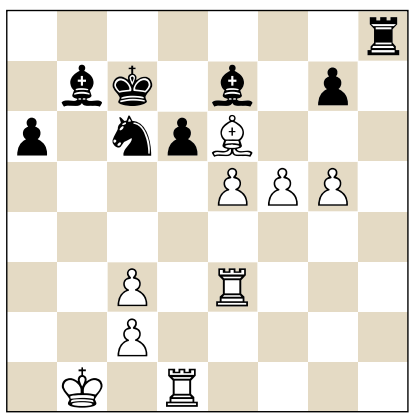
As I couldn't see any edge, I decided to swap the queens.

23...♕xe3 24.♖xe3



24...h6?!
A typical idea to undermine the pawn chain, but here it's unnecessary. Correct was 24...♔c7 25.c4 ♖f8 26.f5 ♘e5, and I cannot see a way for White to progress.

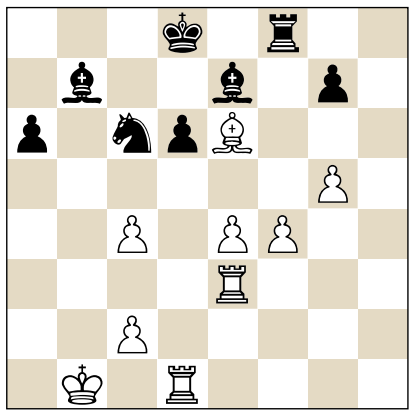
25.c4
Missing a slight chance: 25.e5 ♔c7 26.f5! hxg5 27.hxg5



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

27...♖b8! (on 27...♗xg5, 28.♖g3! is the point. White starts by forcing the bishop to h6: 28...♗h6 29.exd6+ ♔b6 30.c4 ♘d8 31.♗d5. Here the computer finds the resource 31...♗f4 32.♖xg7 ♗e5!, but White is much better) 28.♔a1 (28.f6 ♘xe5! shows the extreme resilience of the comp) 28...♘xe5 29.♖xe5 ♗xg5 30.♖a5 ♗f6, and here Black has good compensation.

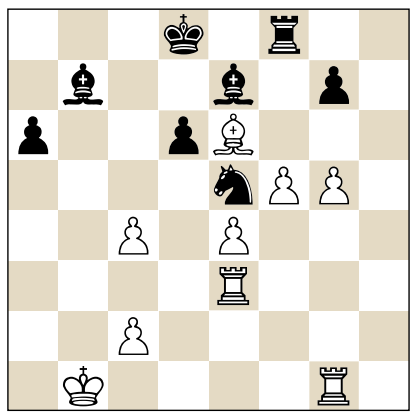
25...hxg5 26.hxg5 ♖f8?!
A natural move, but now the game turns.
Instead, 26...♗c8! would have been simple: 27.♗d5 ♘b4, and Black is out of danger.



27.f5!
We both had the impression that White was much better again, but we both continued to underestimate ...♗c8.

27...♘e5 27...♗xg5 runs into 28.♖xd6+ ♔c7 29.♖d7+ ♔b8 30.♖b3, and White wins.
But he should have gone 27...♗c8! 28.♗d5 ♘e5 29.♖g3 (with the threat of f6 ...gxf6, g6) 29...♖h8 30.f6, and here 30...♗f8! is a clever resource.

28.♖g1

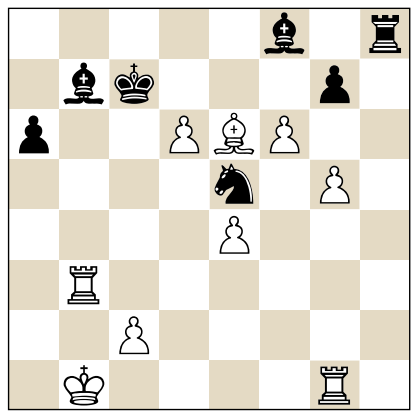


28...d5? This is just panic.
For the third time there was 28...♗c8! 29.♗d5 ♖h8, and Black will hold on after 30.f6 ♗f8!.

29.♖b3 And it's over.

29...♔c7 30.cxd5
Too many pawns.

30...♖h8 31.f6 ♗f8 31...gxf6 will be met by 32.g6. **32.d6+**



And Black resigned in view of 32...♔xd6 33.fxg7 ♗xg7 34.♖xb7. ■

EVGENY ATAROV

Vishy Anand scored 3½/4 from his last new classical games, playing great chess. 'It's nice when you feel that your hands are playing, and not your head, and this time I had that feeling.'

Zurich 2017 – combined

1	Hikaru Nakamura	2793	15
2	Ian Nepomniachtchi	2751	14
3	Vishy Anand	2786	13½
4	Peter Svidler	2747	12
5	Vladimir Kramnik	2811	11
6	Boris Gelfand	2724	9
7	Grigory Oparin	2604	5½
8	Yannick Pelletier	2541	4

Double points for new classical games

Judit Polgar

The Captain and Me

The interaction between team captains and their players is intricate. **JUDIT POLGAR** has a vantage view, since she has been on both sides of the fence.

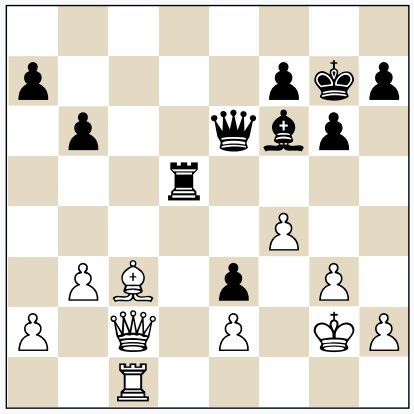
After retiring from tournament chess at the end of the 2014 Tromsø Olympiad, I acted as team captain of Hungary's national men's team during the 2015 European Team Championship in Reykjavik and at the 2016 Baku Olympiad. As a former participant in countless team competitions, it was interesting to experience the complex relationship between the captain and the players from the other side. Now that I have resigned this charge, I will share some of my impressions about some aspects of the captaincy that are sometimes not so obvious.

In this first article, I will deal with the years when I was a player myself, while in the next ones I will speak about the way I interacted with the members of the team in my capacity of captain.

I was only 12 years old when I played my first Olympiad in Thessaloniki in 1988, in the women's section. At that age I was mainly focused on my games, not thinking too much about the captain's emotions, those of Janos Tompa on that occasion. Perhaps understandably so, since in those years board points decided the classification and Janos must have been very confident all the way, because I scored a massive 12½ out of 13. Essentially this meant that almost all our matches started 1-0 for our team.

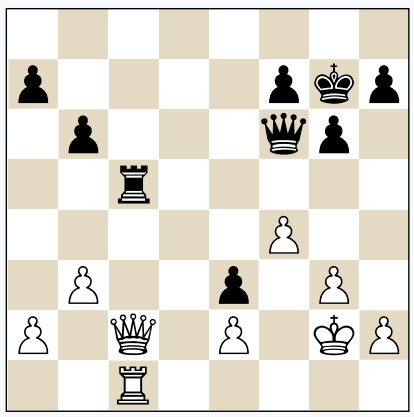
And yet he must have gotten a shock during the last and decisive match against Sweden, when every half point was essential in our neck-and-neck race for the gold medals with the powerful Soviet team.

Borislava Borisova
Judit Polgar
Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988



position after 33.♗c3

I had outplayed my opponent, and the next move was the start of a relatively simple forced sequence that would yield me a decisive advantage:
33...♖c5 34.♗xf6+ ♕xf6



Finding herself in severe time-trouble, my opponent now had a hallucination and played 35.♕xf6?!?!+. After I explained to her that this was not legal, she shook her head in disbelief, making it clear that it had not been intentional. But can you imagine what our captain must have thought, when out of a better position it looked as if I was going to end up in a lost pawn ending?
After this amusing incident the game continued **35.♕xc5** The point is that on 35.♕b1, 35...♕c6+ wins a rook. **35...bxc5 36.♖xc5 ♕a1**
And I won quickly, since White could not organize a fortress.

Our team won 2-1 and we won the gold medals by a margin of half a point.

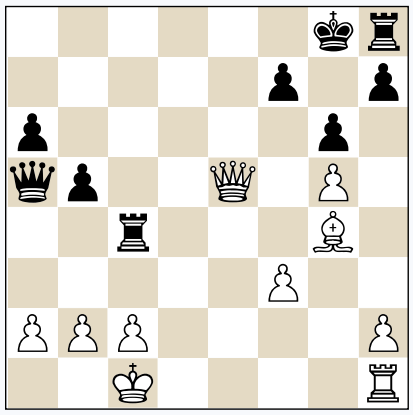
But the crucial moment for our captain had occurred much earlier in the tournament. Our team consisted of the three Polgar sisters and Ildiko Madl, who during the initial rounds had received the terrible news that her boyfriend, Bela Perenyi, who was travelling to Thessaloniki, had died in a car accident. And yet, before the crucial match against the Soviets in Round 5, Tompa (incidentally also Ildiko's personal coach) took the brave decision to throw her into the fight. This proved a very inspired 'move', since Ildiko won with Black and the match ended 2-1 in our favour. This decision says a lot about how important it is for a captain to know the players well and to be able to anticipate their emotions and their readiness to fight in key games.

For a captain it is advisable to keep a permanent eye on the games in order to have an overview of the situation in the match. But as Arshak Petrosian, the captain of the Armenian team, once told me, he or she need not be too concerned about what happens during, say, the first three hours, since the decisive

events mainly take place closer to the time-control.

Here is an example of a game during which our captain, Zoltan Ribli on that occasion, could not really be expected to guess what was actually happening.

Judit Polgar
Laurent Fressinet
Istanbul Olympiad 2000

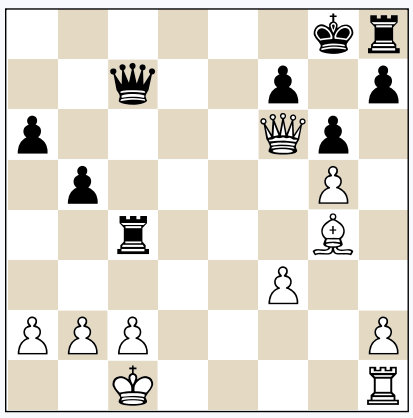


position after 26...♔g8

Both my team mates and Ribli – and probably all the players who happened to pass by – were convinced that, being an exchange down, I was going to settle for a draw with a perpetual. The effects of the next move were virtually impossible to spot for someone not completely immersed in the position. But my opponent was also very surprised when I played:

27.♕f6!! The only effective way to prepare the decisive ♖d1-d8, since after 27.♖d1 ♕c7 28.♕f6, Black has 28...♕f4+.

27...♕c7 27...♕xa2 does not help: 28.♖d1 ♕a1+ 29.♔d2 ♕a5+ 30.♔e3.



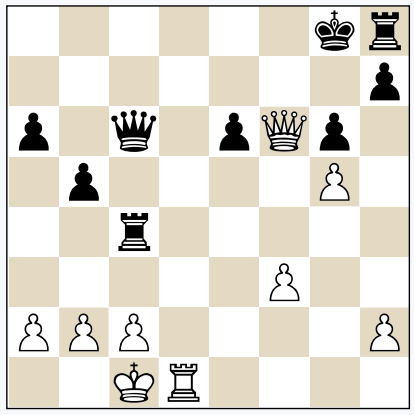
28.♖e1!! Another important move, allowed by the queen retreat and deviating from the pattern set by the above line.

'The captain need not be too concerned about what happens during the first three hours, since the decisive events mainly take place closer to the time-control.'

28...♕c6 The point is that after 28...♕f4+ 29.♔b1 ♕xf6 I have 30.♖e8+ (the back rank check was not available with the rook on d1) 30...♔g7 31.gxf6+.

29.♗e6 Already not the only winning move.

29...fxe6 30.♖d1



White will soon have a queen and lots of pawns for two uncoordinated rooks. 1-0.

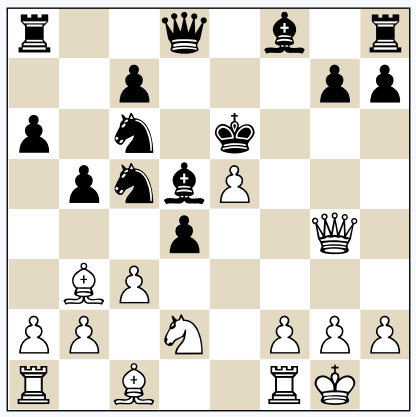
Before the last round of a team competition, one of the tasks of a strong team is to figure out the desired result for obtaining a good result. At the 2000 Istanbul Olympiad, Ribli had calculated that four draws would be enough for the medals in 99 per cent of the cases. After missing several chances, we did indeed draw our last match, but all the other results of the day were unfavourable for us, and we missed out on the medals by a hair's breadth.

There is another interesting aspect here. In small teams, a single player's chances for an individual board medal are more important than the overall team result. This is why, after reaching a high percentage, the player in the best form on those teams does not play in the final rounds. With strong teams things are different, since the only important thing is the team result. In Istanbul, I would have ensured a board gold medal by sitting out the final round, but after missing a win in that final round I even failed to make the podium, once again due to unfavourable results in other matches.

In strong teams, the captain rarely is the players' coach as well. Preparation for the games takes place individually, and no matter how complicated things may seem in the opening, the captain should stay confident that his players know what they are doing. Here is such an example:

Judit Polgar
Shakhriyar Mamedyarov
Bled Olympiad 2002
Ruy Lopez, Open Variation C80

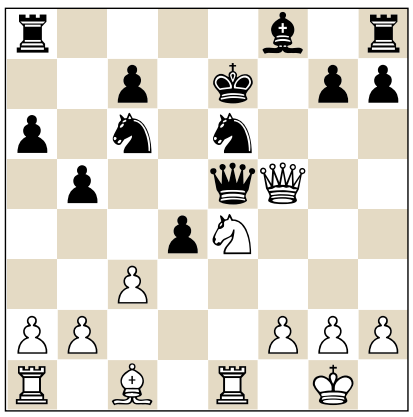
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♘xe4 6.d4 b5 7.♗b3 d5 8.dxe5 ♗e6 9.♘bd2 ♘c5 10.c3 d4 11.♘g5 ♗d5 12.♘xf7 ♔xf7 13.♕f3+ ♔e6 14.♕g4+



All this was played quickly, so our captain, Kallai, could only hope that my preparation was deeper than that of my opponent. At that time, Mamedyarov (like the rest of his teammates) was just a 17-year-old talented boy on his way to becoming a strong player. He made the decisive mistake after thinking for just one minute:

14...♔f7? I had mainly analysed 14...♔e7 15.e6.

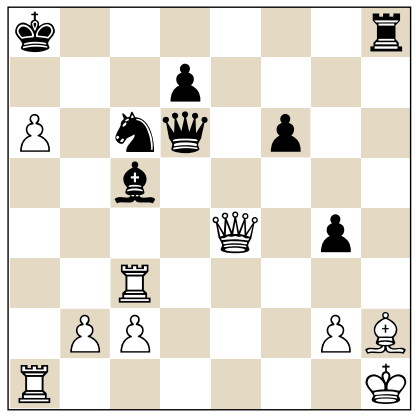
15.♕f5+ Now he sank into thought for half an hour, and Kallai must have understood that things were going my (our) way. **15...♔e7 16.e6**
The same reply would follow other king moves, and with similar effect.
16...♗xe6 17.♖e1! ♕d6 18.♗xe6 ♘xe6 19.♘e4 ♕e5



20.♗g5+ The beginning of the end. Black's poorly coordinated army cannot save its king. **20...♔d7 21.♘c5+ ♗xc5 22.♕f7+ ♔d6 23.♗e7+** 1-0.

I am fully aware of the fact that, through the years, I sometimes unintentionally played with the nerves of my captains. There are moments when even a captain's greatest confidence in his players is shaken when the position is obviously bad. Here is such a moment from my last Olympiad win:

Andres Guerrero Vargas
Judit Polgar
Tromsø Olympiad 2014



position after 32...♘c6

I had played a good game until things spun out of control and I landed in an objectively lost position. But things are still complicated, and if our captain, Tamas Horvath, did not lose his confidence in my ability to mess things up, he was fully rewarded by the final sequence.
33.g3?
Initially, both my opponent and I thought this would win for White, but after a few seconds I discovered that I could deliver mate, much in the same way as when I was a kid.
The most clear-cut win for White was 33.♖h3! ♖xh3 34.gxh3 g3 35.♗g1, with a decisive material advantage and a well-defended king. But apparently there was no need for such radical measures...
33...♖xh2+! 34.♔xh2 ♕d2+
And my opponent resigned in view of 35.♔h1 (35.♕g2 ♕h6+ also mates) 35...♕h6+ 36.♔g2 ♕h3 mate. ■

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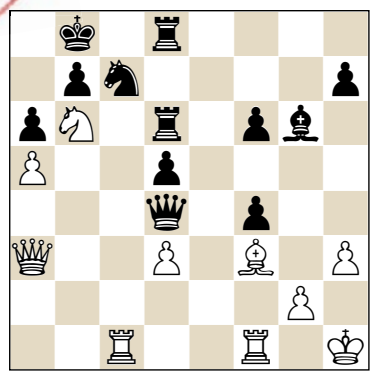
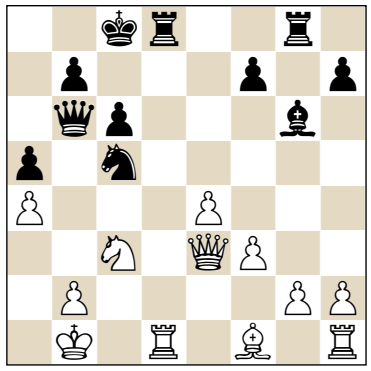
Solutions

from page 27



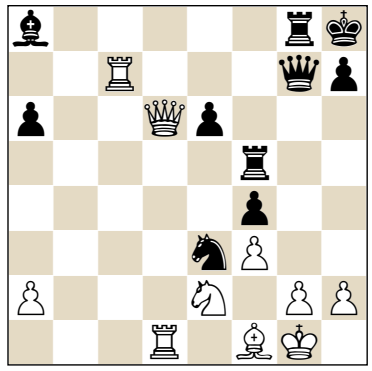
1. Bernadskiy-D.Kovalev
Chisinau 2017

33.♖xc7! ♕xd3 33...♔xc7 34.♖c1+ ♔b8 (34...♖c6 35.♕e7+) 35.♕xd6+! ♖xd6 36.♖c8+ and mate. **34.♕xd6 ♕xf1+ 35.♔h2** Black resigned.



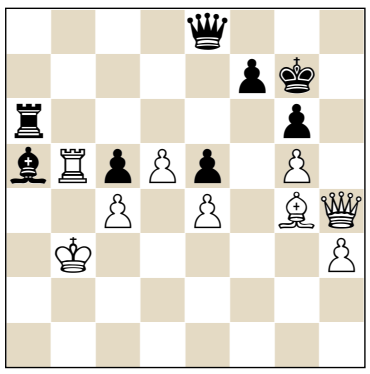
2. Zilka-Kummer
Austria 2013

21...♘xe4! A cascade of discovered attacks. White resigned on account of 22.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 23.♕xb6 ♘xc3+ and 24...♖d1 mate.



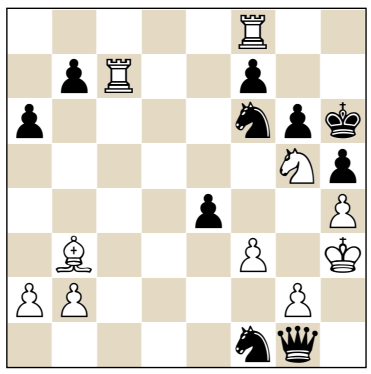
3. Savenkov-Gordievsky
Moscow 2017

30...♕xg2+! 31.♗xg2 ♖xg2+ 32.♔h1 ♗xf3 33.♘d4 ♗e4 34.♕xe6 ♖d2+ White resigned, e.g. 35.♔g1 ♖g5+! and mate.



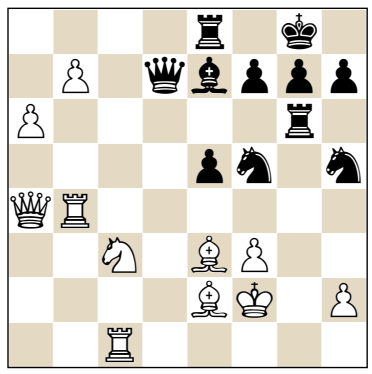
4. Lupulescu-Nevednichy
Calimanesti-Caciulata 2017

61.♗e6! Threatening 62.♕h6+ ♔g8 63.♕xg6+. **61...♔g8** 61...fxe6 loses to 62.♖b7+, and 61...♕h8 to 62.♕f2. **62.♗xf7+! ♕xf7 63.♖b8+ ♕f8 64.♖xf8+ ♔xf8 65.♕h8+ ♔f7 66.♕xe5** Black resigned.



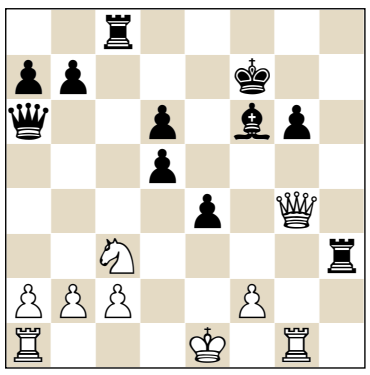
5. Koch-Szuhanek
Novi Sad 2016

39.♖h8+ ♔g7 40.♖h7+! ♘xh7 41.♖xf7+ ♔g8 42.♖d7+! The only square to prevent the black king's escape. **42...♔f8 43.♘xh7+** Black resigned in view of 43...♔e8 44.♘f6+ ♔f8 45.♖f7 mate.



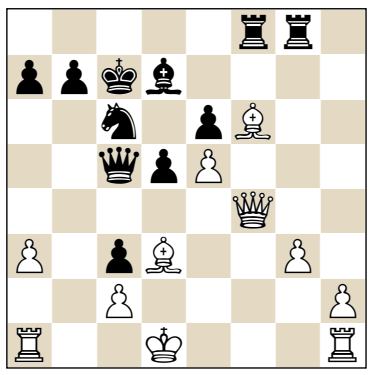
6. Lopez-Fernandez
Havana 2017

29...♘f4! 30.♗xf4 30.♕xd7 ♗h4+ 31.♔f1 ♘xe3 mate; if 30.♔e1 ♗h4+ 31.♗f2 ♘g2+ 32.♔f1 ♘ge3+ 33.♔e1 ♖g1+. **30...exf4! 31.♘d5** 31.♖xf4 ♗c5+. **31...♗h4+ 32.♔f1 ♘e3+** White resigned due to 33.♘xe3 ♕h3+.



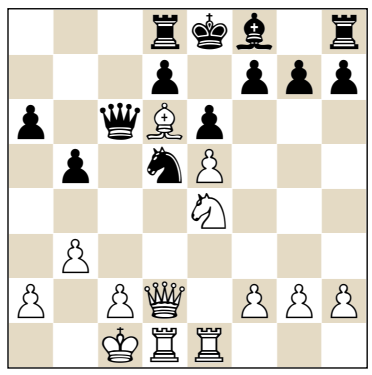
7. Pap-Bogut
Bosnjaci 2010

24...♖cxc3! 25.bxc3 25.♕xg6+ ♔e7 or 25.♕d7+ ♔f8 don't help. **25...♗xc3+ 26.♔d1 ♖d3+!** White resigned; the nicest mating line is 27.♔e2 ♖d4+ 28.♔e3 ♗d2+! 29.♔xd4 ♕c4.



8. Tari-Goganov
Sweden 2017

21...♖xf6! 22.exf6+ Or 22.♕xf6 ♖f8 with attack along the f-file. **22...e5 23.♕h6** White cannot keep preventing ...♕e3 with a mating attack: **23...♖h8!! 24.♕g5 ♖h5!** White resigned.



9. Bartel-G.Szabo
Hungary 2017

19.♕xd5! exd5 19...♕xd5 20.♖xd5 is worse. **20.♘f6+ gxf6 21.exf6+ ♗e7 22.♖xe7+ ♔f8** Now what? **23.♖e8+!!** and Black resigned due to 23...♔xe8 24.♖e1 mate.

Short but Swedish

Malmö GM tourney gets new lease of life

A fine tradition seemed to have been lost, but thanks to a new main sponsor it was revived as the TePe Sigeman tournament. After a five-round sprint, Baadur Jobava shared first place with our man on the spot, the youngest GM in the field, **NILS GRANDELIUS**.

In a self-confident prediction, Nils Grandelius had said he expected to win. He did, albeit in a tie for first with Baadur Jobava.

LARS HEDLUND

The Sigeman tournament is easily the best-known Swedish chess tournament outside of Sweden. The first edition was played a couple of weeks before I was born, in 1993, and it kept going annually until 2014. After a break in 2015 and 2016, the tournament was revived with a new main sponsor, together with the old Sigeman & Co Law firm – the oral hygiene company TePe. It might sound somewhat strange that an oral hygiene company would like to sponsor a chess tournament, but I was told it made a lot of sense, and it does seem that chess can adapt and be sold in any which way. And at the very least we all have a lot of toothbrushes now!

The 2017 edition featured six players – two Swedes taking on four foreigners. Highest-rated (2755) and main favourite was Pavel Eljanov, the number 15 in the world. Coming from an eventful Shamkir tournament (two draws in nine games!), he was eager for revenge. Second seed was Baadur Jobava, who nowadays actually plays for a Malmö club in the Swedish league. With his enterprising style, he was in Malmö to make sure that the spectators would have lots of fun, despite there only being three games a day. Third seed was Nigel Short, who needs no introduction and had actually won the tournament three times, every time he had taken part. Number four was myself, at 23 the youngest person in the group, but in a way also the most experienced one, since I had taken part in more Sigeman tournaments than the rest of the field combined! I had played every edition since 2009, with a shared victory in 2013 as my best effort. The fifth player was Erik Blomqvist, the current Swedish and Nordic Champion. Very ambitious and hard-working, he had progressed steadily over the last few years and is a dangerous attacking and counter-attacking player who rarely makes draws and is capable of beating anyone on a good day. Last but not least, there was the only female, Harika Dronavalli. Always solid and well-prepared, she is best-known for taking bronze in the Women's World Championship three times, in 2012, 2015 and 2017.

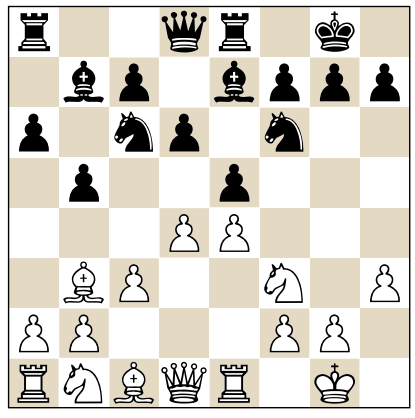
A five-round event is like a sprint, and it was clear that every win would be huge. While in the first round Jobava made an uneventful draw with me, and Harika played very well to draw Eljanov with Black, the game of the day was Nigel Short's flashy win over Erik Blomqvist.

NOTES BY
Nigel Short

Nigel Short
Erik Blomqvist
Sigeman 2017 (1)
Ruy Lopez, Zaitsev Variation

First rounds have difficulties of their own. I had actually been in hospital two days before this game and although by no means seriously ill, I was not at full strength either.

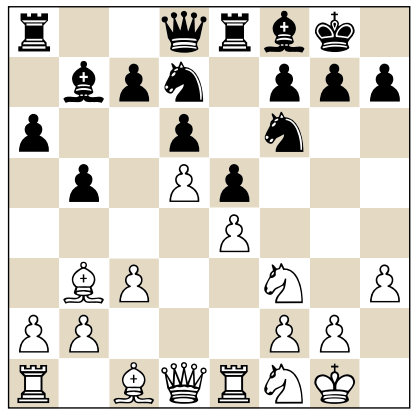
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♗b7 10.d4 ♖e8



And so, the highly-respected Zaitsev Variation. For once I had actually managed to predict my opponent's opening choice.

11.♘bd2 ♗f8 12.d5 A popular and slightly primitive approach, but one which scores fairly well. Besides, it had brought me a couple of important victories in the past.

12...♘b8 13.♘f1 ♘bd7



14.♗g5 But this is a little unusual. I had previously played the routine 14.♘g3, which, importantly, protects the e4-pawn, but otherwise the knight is misplaced,

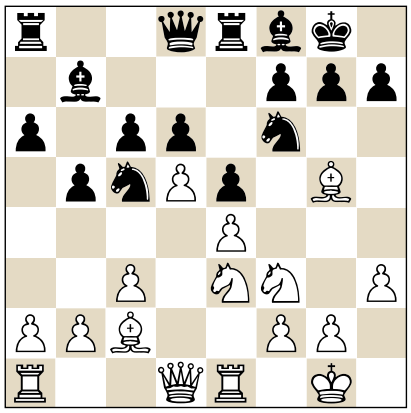
And the much more sophisticated 14.♘3h2, indirectly battling for the d5-square. In both cases, Black has adequate resources, according to theory, although, in practice, White obtains results in excess of 60%.

14...♘c5?! Blomqvist, who had been moving very rapidly before this point, fails to come to terms with the subtly altered strategic circumstances. This standard manoeuvre is

illogical here as it makes fighting for d5 problematic. Better is either 14...h6 or 14...♗e7.

15.♗c2 Automatic, but I also considered 15.a4, which may in fact be better.

15...c6 16.♘e3



16...a5

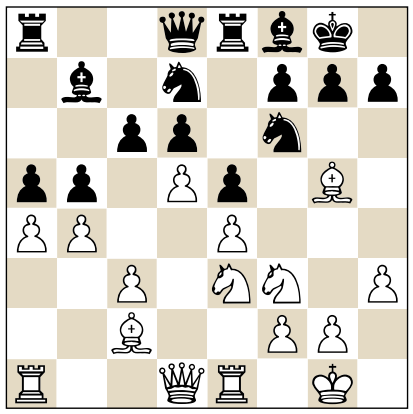
Another important fork. I had expected 16...cxd5 17.♘xd5 ♗xd5 18.♗xf6 ♕xf6 19.♕xd5 ♘e6 after which Black has a backward d-pawn and lousy bishop, but the prospect of a black knight on f4 at some inconvenient moment can be a little disturbing for White.

17.b4

My engine isn't entirely enamoured with this thrust, although it is alright.

17...♘cd7 18.a4

Tactical themes now emerge on the a4-e8 diagonal.

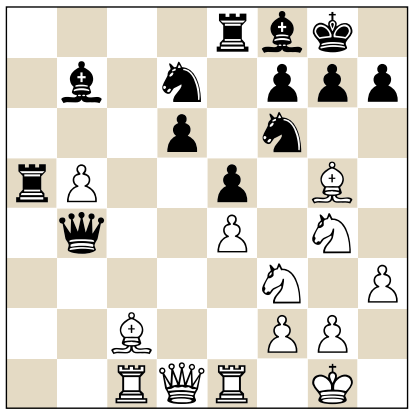


18...♕c7 I expected this, but now the queen is plunged forwards.

After 18...cxd5 19.exd5 axb4 20.cxb4 h6 21.♗h4 g5 can be tried, but only for non-humans.

19.dxc6 ♕xc6 20.axb5 ♕xc3 21.bxa5 ♖xa5 The nature of the position has transformed with the exchanges. White now has to play energetically to exploit the slight disarray in the black camp.

22.♖c1! ♕b4 23.♘g4!

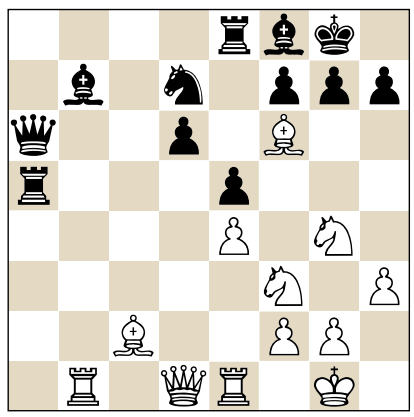


23...♕xb5?! I must admit that I didn't even consider this move, assuming (correctly) that White will quickly build up an overwhelming position. 23...♘xg4 24.♗d2 ♕a3! is the right way (24...♕xb5 25.♖b1) although White still stands somewhat better after 25.hxg4! (25.♗xa5 ♘xf2 is murky, for example 26.♕d2 ♘xh3+).

24.♖b1

24.♗xf6 ♘xf6 25.♘xf6+ gxf6 26.♘h4 is apparently even stronger, as the rook operates effectively on the c-file.

24...♕a6 25.♗xf6



25...♘xf6 I completely overlooked 25...h5 but thankfully 26.♗xg7 is crushing.

26.♘xf6+ gxf6 27.♘h4 ♗c8 28.♗b3 It is inconceivable that Black can withstand the looming attack.

28...♗e6 29.♕h5 ♖c8 30.♘f5

By no means bad, but 30.♖e3! ♖a1

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31.♔h2 ♖xb1 32.♖g3+ ♗g7 33.♕h6 ♔f8 34.♕xg7+ ♔e7 35.♗xe6 ♔xe6 36.♖f3 is more incisive. I calculated this variation accurately, but failed to appreciate just how crushing this position was. The king will flee to temporary safety, but not without the annihilation of his pawns.

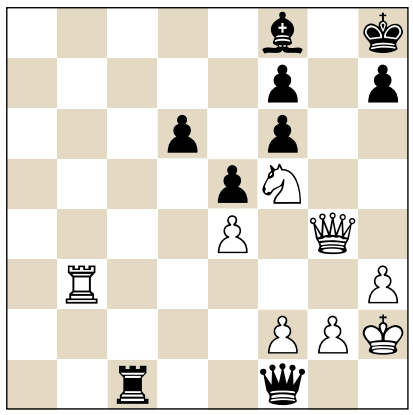
30...♖a3

Black has numerous other attempts to defend, but nothing satisfactory.

31.♖e3 ♖xb3 32.♖exb3 ♗xb3 33.♖xb3 ♖c1+ 34.♔h2 ♕f1

A little glimmer of counterplay, but too late.

35.♕g4+ ♔h8



36.♕g7+! Black resigned.

■ ■ ■

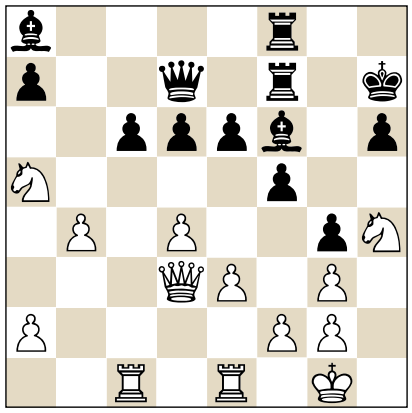
Things heated up the second day. Eljanov surprised Blomqvist with a French Defence, and continued in what looked like overly aggressive fashion. After forceful play by Blomqvist, Eljanov was punished and Blomqvist set a new record for the highest-rated player ever beaten by a Swede! (Editorial note: If anyone is wondering about Anatoly Karpov's rating when he lost to Ulf Andersson – the famous exchange sacrifice – in Milan in 1975: at the time, the World Champion was rated 2705. Karpov was rated 2775 when he lost another game – after many wins in the intervening years – to Andersson in Nyköping in 1995, but that was a rapid game.)

I was lucky to survive a bad endgame against Harika (she could even have won a piece at one point) and Jobava beat Short in his typical style.

LARS HEDLUND

The game between Nigel Short and Erik Blomqvist became an instant classic when the Englishman forced the Swedish Champion's resignation with a flashy queen sacrifice.

Baadur Jobava
Nigel Short
Malmö 2017 (2)



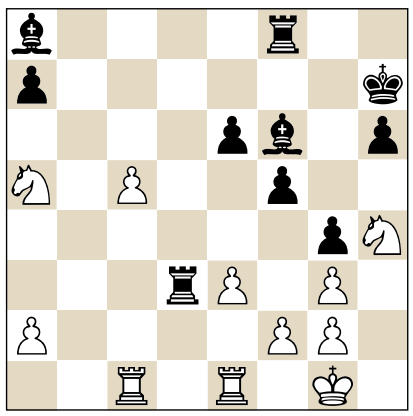
position after 23.♕d3

In his usual style, Jobava has created a lot of imbalances in the position. Black has a potentially very powerful bishop pair, but his pawn structure is very dubious. The white knights are on the edge of the board, but the one on a5 puts pressure on c6 and the h4-knight will be very strong if White is allowed to push e4.

All these factors make clear what Black should play.

23...♖g7?

No, not this one, but 23...c5!!, making the a8-bishop a monster, stopping e4, getting rid of the weak c6-pawn and opening up the position. Not bad for one move!: 24.dxc5 (24.bxc5 dxc5 25.♖xc5 ♗e7 26.♖e5 ♗xh4 27.gxh4 g3! 28.fxg3 ♖g8, with a huge attack along the g-file and 29.e4 can be met by 29...♖xg3! 30.♕xg3 ♕xd4+ 31.♔h1 f4, winning back the pawn with serious pressure) 24...dxc5 25.♕xd7 ♖xd7 26.bxc5 ♖d3



ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

gives Black great compensation. The c-pawn is not dangerous and how will the h4-knight ever get into the game again?

24.e4!

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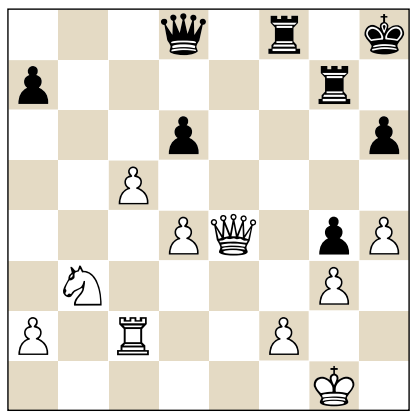
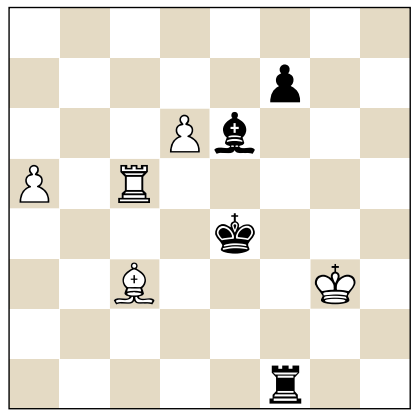
Of course, Jobava takes his chance.
24...♗g5 25.♖c2 c5
The right idea, but too late!
26.exf5 exf5 27.bxc5?!
27.d5! was a nice way to keep the bishop dead on a8. Now White can put a rook on e6, with a clear advantage.
27...♗xh4 28.gxh4 ♕d8
28...♗e4! was mentioned by Jobava after the game. After 29.♖xe4 fxe4 30.♕xe4+ ♕f5 Black gets a better version of 32...♕e7 and should be OK.
29.♘b3 ♗e4 30.♖xe4 fxe4 31.♕xe4+ ♔h8 32.g3



The computer says Black is OK here, but with two pawns for the exchange Black's task is surely the much harder one.
32...♖e8 This was inaccurate. 32...♕e7! 33.♕xe7 ♖xe7 34.c6 d5! was the way, with just about enough counterplay, according to Stockfish.
Now after **33.♕f4 dxc5 34.♖xc5 ♕b6 35.♖f5** White was in full control and went on to win in convincing fashion.

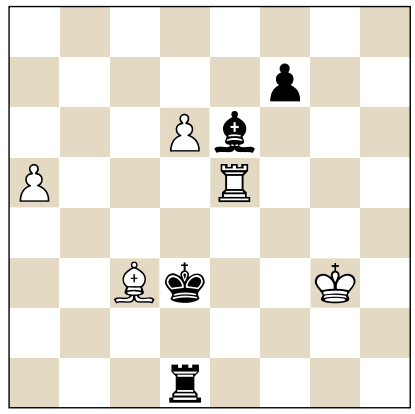
The action continued in Round 3. A well-prepared Blomqvist put a lot of pressure on Harika, which she handled well, but when it seemed clear that she had survived her difficulties, she blundered an exchange. Eljanov-Jobava was a big fight in which both players missed good opportunities on the way to the draw. Finally, I played the Marshall against Short. After studying 1980s chess history I was well aware that Short used to be a great expert, but I decided it would be a nice challenge. However, Short caught me completely off-guard in an old line, and I was soon much worse. I did my best to hang on and was on my way to a draw when we got this position:

Nigel Short
Nils Grandelius
Malmö 2017 (3)



position after 62.♗c3

The two passed pawns look dangerous, but the opposite-coloured bishops make the draw very likely. The only thing I have to do is get the king back to the a-pawn. But after six hours of play we both lost concentration for a moment:
62...♖d1??
Instead, 62...♖f3+ would have secured the draw: 63.♔g2 ♖d3 64.♗e5 ♖d5.
63.♖e5+ ♔d3



64.♗b4??
We both forgot that after 64.♖e1 the black rook is trapped! The a-pawn simply queens.
64...♔c4 65.♖e4+ ♔b5
Now Black has a fortress again.
66.♔f2 ♖d3 67.♔e2 ♖d5 68.♖h4 ♗d7 69.♔e3 ♗e6 Draw.

This meant that with two rounds left the lead was shared between Jobava and Blomqvist, with me and Short half a point behind. The fourth round turned out to be crucial.

NOTES BY
Nils Grandelius

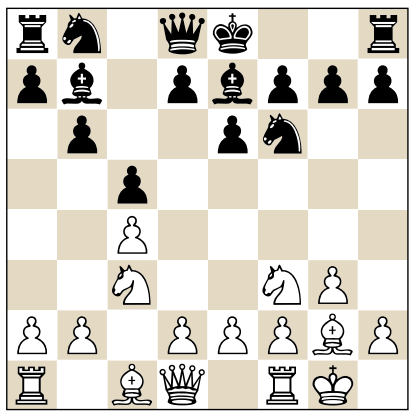
Nils Grandelius
Erik Blomqvist
Malmö 2017 (4)
English Opening

1.c4 In a must-win situation there are many different approaches to take, but in this game I mainly chose what I considered to be the least comfortable choice for my opponent. Seeing Blomqvist's preparation for the previous round and knowing how strong he is with the initiative, I decided to keep the game slow.

1...c5 2.♘f3 ♘f6

2...♘c6 3.♘c3 e5 was played when we drew in the Swedish Championship last year. After this draw Blomqvist won his remaining six games!

3.♘c3 e6 4.g3 b6 5.♗g2 ♗b7 6.0-0 ♗e7



7.d4 7.♖e1 is the other main move, after which Black has a choice between a normal Hedgehog or activity in the centre with 7...d5.

7...cxd4 8.♕xd4 0-0

8...d6 is slightly more common, but usually transposes. It would stop what I do in the game, but that's hardly dangerous anyway.

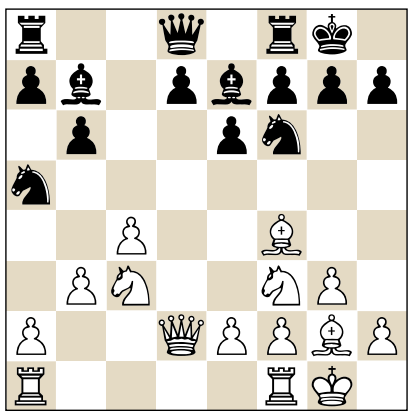
9.♗f4

A rare move, mainly aimed at getting out of the theory.

9.♖d1 d6 10.♗g5 is the main line, and here Kramnik played 10...♘c6!? 11.♕f4 ♕b8 a couple of times recently.

9...♘c6! Here 9...d6 would be a serious inaccuracy, since 10.♕d2 makes the d6-pawn quite weak.

10.♕d2 ♘a5 11.b3

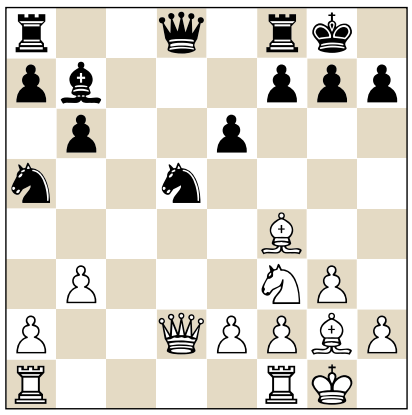


11...♗b4!? Similar to the game, and possibly even safer, was 11...d5 12.cxd5 ♘xd5 13.♘xd5 ♕xd5, but there is nothing wrong with 11...♗b4 either.

12.♕b2 d5 13.cxd5

I tried making something like 13.a3 work, but it's not even remotely close after 13...♗xc3 14.♕xc3 dxc4 15.b4 ♘b3 16.♖ad1 ♕c8, when Black is simply a pawn up.

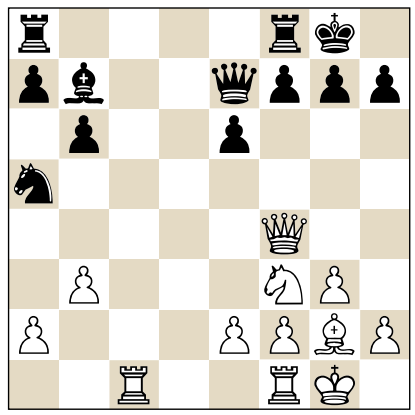
13...♗xc3 14.♕xc3 ♘xd5 15.♕d2



15...♘xf4

The computer indicates 15...f6!?, which restricts both the f3-knight and the dark-squared bishop, but also creates a weakness. Still, seeing what happened in the game it's definitely something to consider.

16.♕xf4 ♕e7 17.♖ac1



The position is almost symmetrical, and the only very slight issue Black has is his knight on a5. If the knight gets back to a reasonable square without anything bad happening in the meantime, it is just a draw.

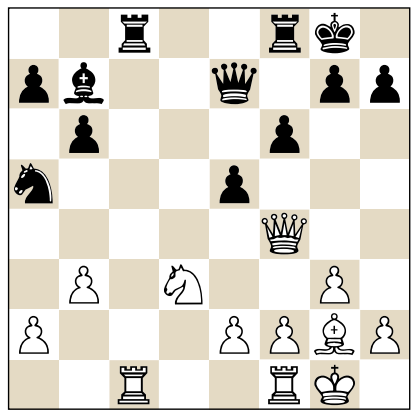
17...♖ac8

During the game I considered 17...♘c6 to be the most accurate: 18.♕a4 (18.♘g5 ♖ac8 19.♘xh7 ♔xh7 20.♗xc6 unfortunately doesn't work because of 20...♖xc6!) 18...♖ac8 19.♖fd1 ♖fd8 20.♘e1!?, and White's position is still more pleasant, although gradually Black should equalize, of course.

18.♘e5 It's not much, but at least I provoke some weaknesses now.

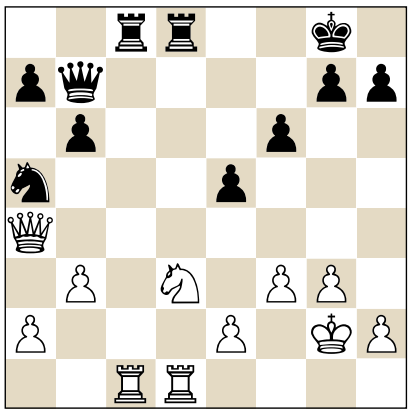
18.♖fd1 ♖xc1 19.♖xc1 ♘c6 looked too solid for Black: 20.♘e5 ♘xe5 21.♕xe5. This trades too many pieces to really be threatening: 21...♗xg2 22.♔xg2 ♕b7+ 23.f3 ♖c8 24.♕e4 ♕b8 25.♕f4! ♕a8! 26.♖c7 ♖xc7 27.♕xc7. White has some 'activity', but without rooks it's a dead draw.

18...f6 19.♘d3 e5

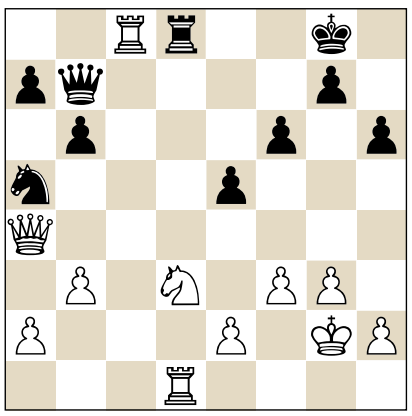


20.♕a4 Still trying to restrict the knight. 20.♕b4 ♕xb4 21.♘xb4 ♗xg2 22.♔xg2 ♔f7 and the black king will be strong on e6.

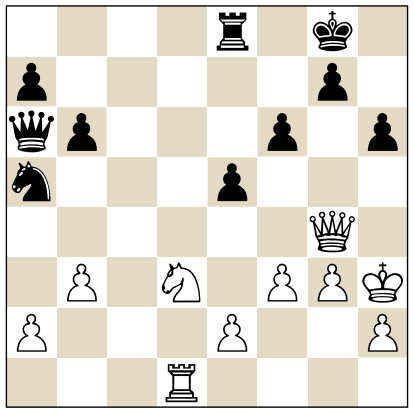
20...♗xg2 21.♔xg2 ♕b7+ 22.f3 ♖fd8 23.♖fd1
Perhaps the decisive moment of tournament!
23.♖xc8 was the more straightforward way: 23...♖xc8 24.♖c1. This looks nice, but after 24...h6 there is no way to increase the pressure.



23...h6?! 23...♘c6 was the obvious move, after which I have been unable to find anything even slightly tricky: 24.♕c4+ ♔h8 25.♕e4 ♖d4 26.♕f5 could be met in many ways, but easiest is 26...♖dd8!, as Blomqvist pointed out in the post-mortem. Now I am unable to stop ...♘d4 in a good way and there is no reason I should be better.
24.♖xc8



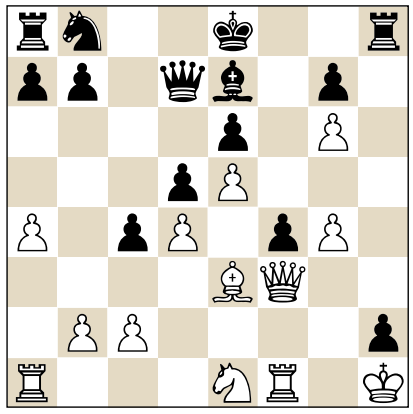
24...♖xc8?? 24...♕xc8 still holds: 25.♖c1 ♕d7 26.♕xd7 ♖xd7 27.b4 ♘b7, and although I've got the c-file, there is no good way to break the ♘d6/♖d7 set-up.
25.♕g4! Suddenly it turns out that there is no defence against the threats of ♘xe5 or ♘f4. Try for yourself!
25...♕a6
25...♖c7 26.♘xe5 fxe5 27.♖d8+ is just mate: 27...♔f7 28.♕f5+ ♔e7 29.♕f8+ ♔e6 30.♖d6 mate.
26.♔h3 The simplest.
26...♖e8



27.♘f4! 27.♘xe5 also wins after 27...♖xe5 28.♖d7 ♖g5 29.♖d8+ ♔h7 30.♕e4+ f5 31.♕e6!, but the text is much simpler.
27...♘c6 28.♘h5 The rest requires no comment. **28...♖e7 29.♘xf6+ ♔h8 30.♖d6 ♕b7 31.♕g6**
Black resigned.

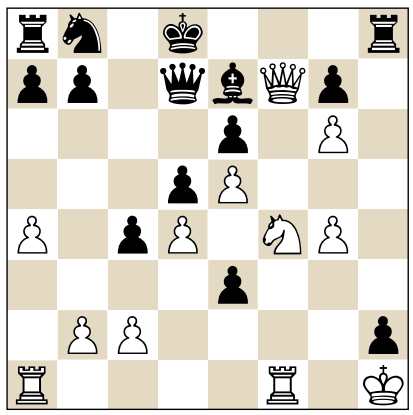
After this game I went to the commentary room, not to show the game but to follow what happened in the incredibly exciting game between Short and Eljanov. The atmosphere was great, with me and Jobava joining commentator Stellan Brynell in trying to explain what was going on in the crazy position. See for yourselves:

Nigel Short
Pavel Eljanov
Malmö 2017 (4)



position after 19...f4

Eljanov has just played ...f5-f4 to keep the kingside closed, and now Short spent most of his remaining half hour making an important decision.
20.♘g2!?
Here 20.♗xf4 is the normal move, but during his thinking Short must have realized that after 20...♘c6 21.c3 0-0-0 Black will play ...♖df8, ...♕e8 and pick up the g6-pawn, after which he is simply better. Therefore Short decides to go for a gamble.
20...fxe3! Eljanov, with nothing to lose in the tournament, decides to pick up the gauntlet.
20...♘c6 21.♘xf4 0-0-0 is now completely different, since the knight is very active on f4 and h5.
21.♕f7+ ♔d8 22.♘f4



22...♔c7!
Definitely the critical move.
22...♘c6 23.♘xe6+ ♔c8 24.♕xg7 ♖e8 25.♕f7 seems OK for White, because after 25...♘d8 26.♘xd8 ♔xd8 27.g7 ♔c7 28.♕g6 ♖g8 29.♖f7 ♖ae8 30.♖e1 White picks up the

Malmö 2017 — **cat. XVI**

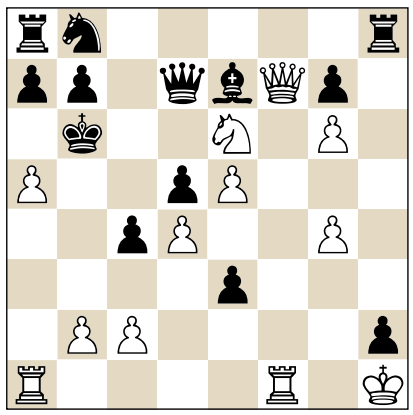
					1	2	3	4	5	6		TPR
1	**Nils Grandelius**	IGM	SWE	2665	*	½	½	1	½	½	3	2718
2	**Baadur Jobava**	IGM	GEO	2713	½	*	½	½	½	1	3	2709
3	**Pavel Eljanov**	IGM	UKR	2755	½	½	*	0	½	1	2½	2628
4	**Erik Blomqvist**	IGM	SWE	2546	0	½	1	*	1	0	2½	2670
5	**Harika Dronavalli**	IGM	IND	2531	½	½	½	0	*	½	2	2601
6	**Nigel Short**	IGM	ENG	2688	½	0	0	1	½	*	2	2570

e3-pawn, with a solid g7-pawn as compensation for the bishop.

23.♘xe6+ ♔b6!

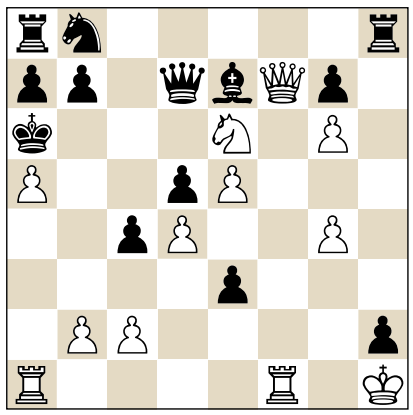
As 23...♔c6? 24.♘xg7 ♖f8 25.♖f6+! ♗xf6 26.♕xf8 is just winning for White now due 26...♗xg7? 27.♕c5, mate.

24.a5+



24...♔a6? Actually, 24...♔c6!! is just winning for Black, because he is now ready to develop 'normally' with ...♘a6. And 25.♘xg7 doesn't work here: 25...♖f8 26.♖f6+ ♔b5!, and White will lose his rook, after which Black will win easily.

24...♔b5 is also possible, but who would play this? For instance, 25.♘f4 ♖d8 26.b3!, with some play, although objectively Black should be winning.



25.b4?

With this move Nigel tries to continue his attack, but the black king is difficult to reach, and White should have played for material instead.

25.♘xg7! is as simple as it is strong: 25...♖f8 (after 25...♘c6 26.♘e6 the threat of ♘c5+ is very difficult to stop. The computer gives 26...e2 as the best try, but after the simple 27.♖fe1 b6 28.g7 ♖hg8 29.♖xe2 White is just winning) 26.♕e6+! ♔b5 (26...♕xe6 27.♘xe6 ♖xf1+ 28.♖xf1, and Black can't prevent 29.♘c7+, winning a full rook) 27.♖f7! ♕xe6 28.♘xe6 ♖xf7 29.gxf7 ♔c6 30.g5! ♔d7 31.f8♕ ♗xf8 32.♘xf8+ ♔e7 33.♘g6+, and White emerges a pawn up.

CALLE ERLANDSSON

Nils Grandelius and his girlfriend Ellen Kakulidis, celebrating at the closing banquet. 'If there is one thing I learnt from the recent World Championship match it's that +1 is enough, no matter how you get there!'

Nigel Short jokingly remarked that I was a 'slippery bastard'.

25...cxb3 26.♖fb1 ♖c8 27.♕f1+

27.♖xb3 e2! is the point – the e2-pawn stays alive and dangerous!

27...♕b5 28.♕xb5+ ♔xb5 29.♖xb3+ ♔a6

And Black easily won the endgame.

This meant that, going into the final round, four of the six participants could still win the tournament! Jobava and I were half a point ahead of Blomqvist and Eljanov. Jobava decided not to tempt fate and went for the solid Petroff Defence, holding a draw relatively easily. This gave me the chance to win the tournament outright. Eljanov played very creatively with his king in the centre, but when he misjudged some tactics, he left me clearly better. But the position was a mess in which I failed to find the best moves and allowed Eljanov to regain the upper hand, albeit with very little time on the clock. In great time-pressure he gave back his extra pawn, and then tried to hold a slightly worse position. I waxed optimistic, but all my attempts stranded on accurate and professional defending, and the draw was a fact.

So Jobava and I ended up tying for first, and in line with the tournament's tradition of not having any tiebreaks we were both declared winners. As I had saved a few lost positions, Nigel Short jokingly remarked that I was a 'slippery bastard'. But if there is one thing I learnt from the recent World Championship match it's that +1 is enough, no matter how you get there! The tournament concluded with a nice closing banquet with the CEO of TePe, Joel Eklund, saying he was looking forward to another 23 years of the tournament! ■

Sadler on Books

Searching for simple themes and clear guidance

The past month has been rather hectic as I started a new job after 2½ years working at the same customer. Whenever I change jobs, opening books get traded in for technical manuals and chess takes a back seat. In this case, it was unfortunate timing as the last weekend of the 4NCL was looming with champions Guildford (my team) and challengers Cheddleton neck-and-neck at the top and heading for a last-round shootout. Not the right time to lose interest in chess! I was looking for a low-effort way to keep my feeling for chess alive, and so I was very happy to spot four recent DVD's on positional themes: two by Sergei Tiviakov and two by Adrian Mikhalchishin. Looking at the titles, I hoped that I would get some instruction and inspiration across a broad range of topics.

What do I look for in a DVD? I've mentioned before that I mostly watch them slumped on the sofa in a catatonic state after a day's information overload, so I don't want anything complicated. No long variations, no enormous digressions, just simple themes, lively examples and clear guidance. In general, these DVD's gave me pretty much what I was looking for!

We'll start off with Tiviakov's *The Art of Defence*. When reviewing Soltis' *New Art of Defence* in New In Chess 2015/2, I mentioned that there were very few good books on this topic. Sergei is renowned as an excellent defender, so I was looking forward to hearing his views on the topic.

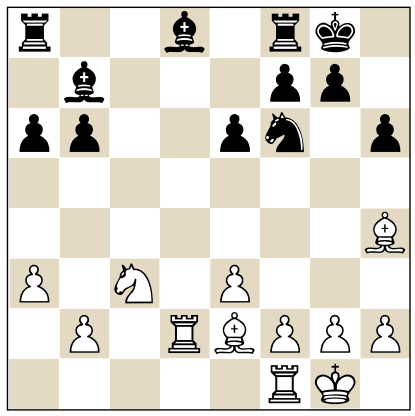
Being swamped with work in a new job and looking for a low-effort way to keep his feeling for chess alive, **MATTHEW SADLER** watched DVDs on positional themes. And read some books, of course.

The DVD is divided up into six sections covering different defensive techniques:

1. Exchanges (including exchanging into a fortress)
2. Eliminating dangerous pieces
3. Running with the king
4. Improving pieces
5. Counterattack
6. Prophylaxis

I will have to be honest and say that the quality of the first 4 sections felt uneven to me. I regularly had a troubled look on my face, wondering whether some examples really fitted the chosen theme, or perhaps more accurately, feeling that the essence of an example was something other than the theme Sergei was demonstrating. I'll just give you an example from the very first chapter to show you what I mean.

The first section explains the common defensive technique of exchanging as many pieces as possible to simplify the situation. Tiviakov notes that this technique is also linked to another defensive technique: exchanging the opponent's most dangerous pieces. He starts off with this classic example:

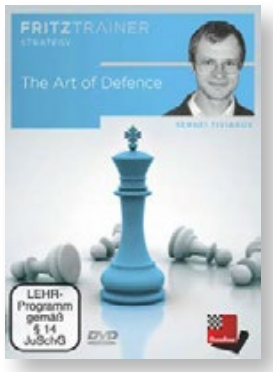


Capablanca-Alekhine
Buenos Aires Wch-match 1927 (15)
position after 17.♖xd2

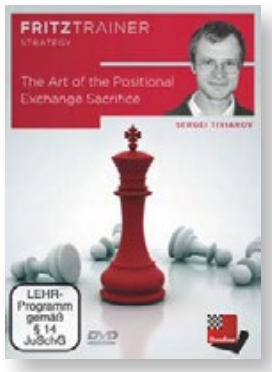
17...♘e4 18.♘xe4 ♗xh4 19.♘d6 ♗d5 20.e4 ♖fd8 21.♘xf7 ♔xf7 22.exd5 ♖xd5 23.♖xd5 exd5 24.♖d1 ♗f6 25.♗f3 ♖c8 26.♗xd5+ ♔e7 27.b3 ♗b2 28.a4 ♖c1 29.♖xc1 ♗xc1 30.♗c4 ½-½.

I love the example, but this is surely more an example of forcing a tactical crisis in the position before the opponent has time to mobilise completely than a demonstration of exchanging to neutralise the opponent's position. With forcing play, Black sucks White's pieces forward into Black's position (♘e4-d6) and while Black's position is collapsing (20.e4) he manages to aim a low blow at the advanced white knight (20...♖fd8), which leads to wholesale liquidation. The result of the whole

The Art of Defence
by Sergei Tiviakov
DVD
ChessBase, 2017
★★★★☆

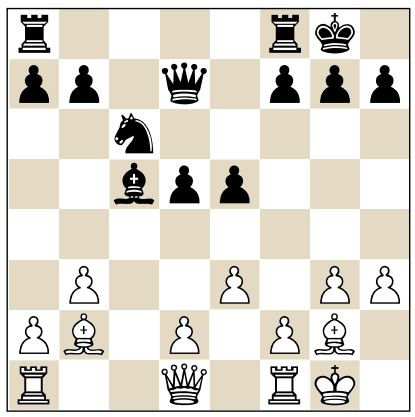


The Art of the Positional Exchange Sacrifice
by Sergei Tiviakov
DVD
ChessBase, 2017
★★★★★



operation is indeed mass exchanges, but the amount of calculation and judgement required to ensure that the position resulting after move 23 is completely drawn makes this – in my opinion – something else than a demonstration of the technique of piece exchanges.

This feeling was reinforced by the very next example:



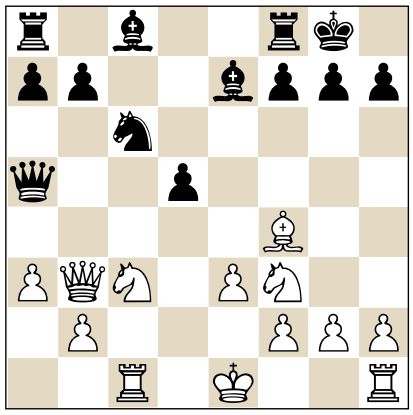
Kortchnoi-Karpov
Merano Wch-match (15) 1981
position after 15...d5

Black's last move move once again provokes a crisis in the position before White is fully mobilised.

After the sequence **16.♗xe5 ♘xe5 17.d4 ♗d6 18.dxe5 ♗xe5 19.♖c1 d4 20.♖c5 ♗f6 21.♖d5 ♕c7 22.exd4 ♖ad8** White's extra pawn was not worth that much and Karpov made an easy draw. As in the previous example, the result of the operation was mass exchanges, but I do feel again that the primary defensive technique used here was not really tightly related to the theme of the section.

In general I was lukewarm about the first four sections, which made me all the happier when the last two sections really started to grab my attention.

The section on counterattack begins with a very thorough explanation of the famous game Taimanov-Larsen, Vinkovci 1970, where Tiviakov deals with all facets of this defensive technique: technical and psychological.

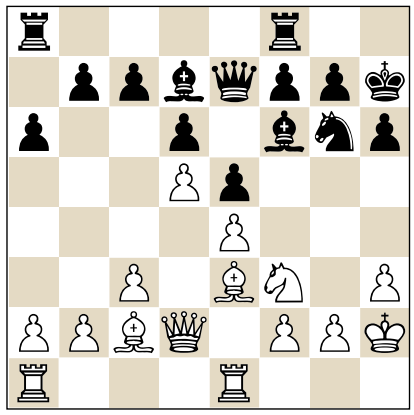


Taimanov-Larsen
Vinkovci 1970
position after 14.♕b3

14...g5!!

In particular, I liked Tiviakov's insight that counterattack doesn't necessarily change the evaluation of the position but that the change in the character of the position is often enough to elicit mistakes from the opponent.

The DVD rounded off with a very good explanation of prophylaxis in which I particularly enjoyed the 15 minutes Tiviakov spent discussing the game Schlechter-Nimzowitsch.



Schlechter-Nimzowitsch
Carlsbad 1907
position after 17.♔h2

17...♘h8 18.♘g1 g5 19.g3 ♘g6 20.♕d1 ♗g7 21.♕f3 a5 22.♘e2 ♗b5 23.a4 ♗d7 24.♖h1 ♕e8 25.h4 ♕c8 26.♗d3 ♗g4 27.♕g2 gxh4 28.f3 h3 29.♕f1 f5 30.fxg4 fxe4 31.♕xh3 exd3 32.♗xh6 ♖h8 0-1.

Tiviakov's explanation of the plans of both opponents (on both wings) and the cleverness of Nimzowitsch's choices is masterly and made me look at this well-known fragment in a completely new light. In conclusion, a good DVD, with a slightly weaker start and a very strong finish! Recommended!

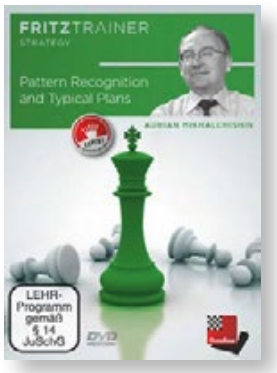
■ ■ ■

Another instalment in Tiviakov's DVD strategy series is *The Art of the Positional Exchange Sacrifice* and a very fine achievement it is too!

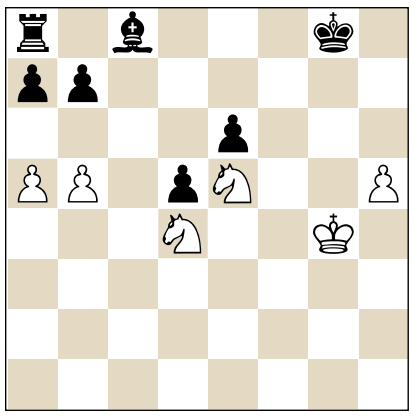
Strangely enough, it's not the first work on the subject: Russell Enterprises had brought out Sergey Kasparov's *The Exchange Sacrifice: A Practical Guide* last year. That book was high on entertainment value, but I found it a little too confusing to be

'Counterattack doesn't necessarily change the evaluation of the position but the change in the character of the position is often enough to elicit mistakes from the opponent.'

Pattern Recognition and Typical Plans by Adrian Mikhalchishin
DVD
ChessBase, 2017
★★★☆☆



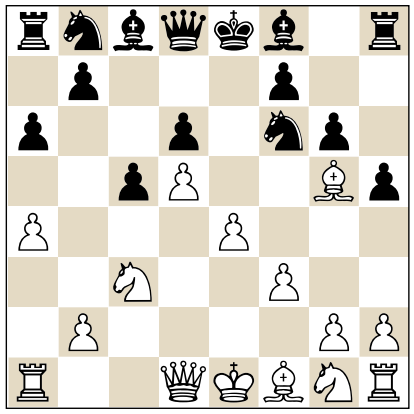
sure I was drawing the correct lessons from it. Tiviakov does the didactic part much better. I really liked the way he started off with a consideration of Nimzowitsch's famous example position from *My System*:



Nimzowitsch Position

Nimzowitsch used this as an example of the power of blockade but it's also a very effective way of giving the viewer a feel for what the Positional Exchange Sacrifice entails and what the advantages could be.

In his ensuing discussion of the position, Tiviakov postulates some very astute ideas about the way you should play after sacrificing the exchange in this way – don't exchange pieces, use long pawn chains – and he regularly flags these ideas when they come up later in the following sections. The material is based for 90% on classic games of Petrosian, Gligoric and Botvinnik with a few fine efforts from Sergei himself (his game against Van der Weide is particularly good) thrown in for good measure. I enjoyed it greatly, and it definitely had an effect on my thinking. When I reached the following position against Ivan Sokolov on the last day of the 4NCL weekend...



Sadler-Sokolov
United Kingdom 4NCL 2017
position after 9.♗g5

... the first idea that popped into my head for Black was ...h4 followed by ...♖h5xg5!. (Which didn't happen, as White withdrew his bishop to e3 after 9...♗e7. White won, but that was another story – ed.)

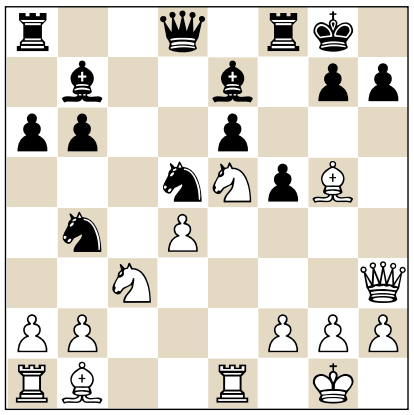
All in all, another fantastic effort from Sergei. I think we'll stretch this one to 5 stars!

■ ■ ■

Ever a glutton for punishment, I carried on the positional DVD theme with *Pattern Recognition and Typical Plans* and *Pawn structures you should know*, both by Adrian Mikhalchishin. Both DVD's deal with patterns of play in chess and there is much to enjoy in both DVD's. There is a wealth of well-chosen examples and Mikhalchishin is an entertaining and lively host. His habit of playing a move on the board and then almost shouting 'you see!?' kept me thoroughly entertained all through the many hours of content.

I will have to be churlish though and make one serious complaint about them. It suddenly occurred to me while watching that DVD's don't have the same quality control as modern chess books. I've heard from a number of authors that publishers are blunder-checking the ChessBase files that authors submit and then querying any mistakes they find. Makes sense and it's a worthwhile effort judging from the quality of the books being published nowadays. It's much more difficult to do this with DVD's and I'm afraid that both of Mikhalchishin DVD's are riddled with tactical mistakes (something that never happens with Tiviakov's DVD's). I had the strong feeling that Mikhalchishin had selected examples for their thematic content but not necessarily played through the whole game. This leads to some rather strange episodes: for example, in the game Cramling-Krush, FIDE World Championship 2012, Mikhalchishin demonstrates the typical idea of ...f5 blocking White's kingside initiative along the b1-h7 diagonal in IQP positions...

'It suddenly occurred to me while watching that DVD's don't have the same quality control as modern chess books.'

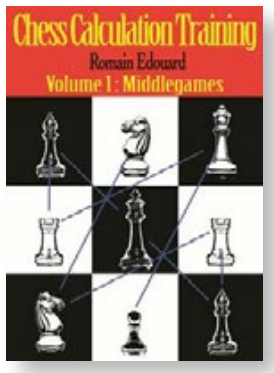


Cramling-Krush
Khanty-Mansiysk FIDE Wch 2012 (2.4)
position after 15...f5

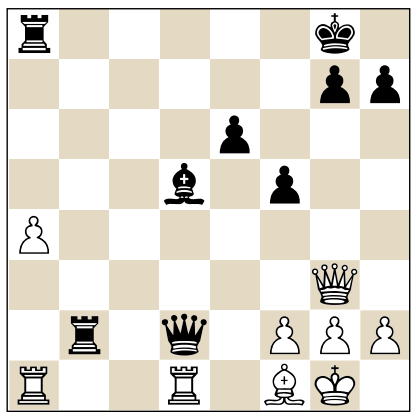
... which is absolutely fine (I also used this idea in my second 4NCL game

Pawn Structures You Should Know
by Adrian Mikhalchishin
DVD
ChessBase, 2017
★★★☆☆

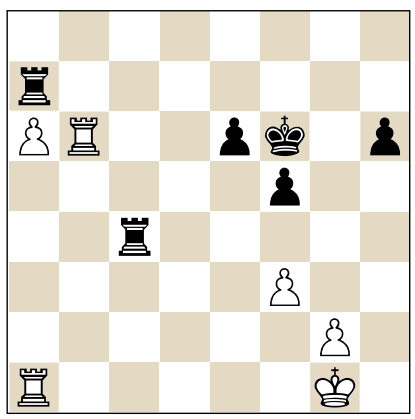
Chess Calculation Training Volume 1: Middlegames
by Romain Edouard
Thinkers Publishing, 2017
★★★★☆



of the weekend, so it definitely influenced me!). However, although Black gained an advantage she soon went wrong and ended up equal or a tiny bit worse.



Through inertia, Mikhalchishin keeps on claiming a (big) advantage for Black even up to this point...



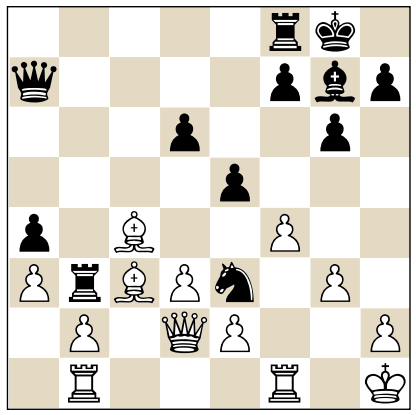
... where it's abundantly clear that if anyone is better, it's White. It's really something that should not have been allowed to be released and there are similar episodes in many places. I'd feel bad marking the DVD's too far down because I enjoyed them despite the many mistakes, but just be warned if you do buy them!

■ ■ ■

The last part of my training regime was part of a mail bomb of 3 books from Thinkers Publishing. Opening the parcel, my attention was drawn to *Chess Calculation Training Volume I: Middlegames* by Romain Edouard. I'll have to declare an interest here as this book was proofread / translated by my Guildford team captain and his son while Romain is a Guildford teammate!

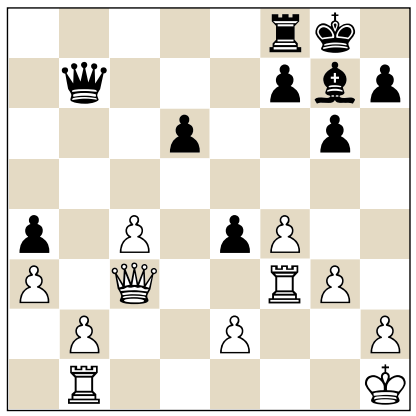
The concept is unusual but effective. There is an initial section of 96 easier puzzles which Edouard suggests could be used as a little warm-up before attempting the other sections. I tried it this way every evening for a week, doing 3 or 4 easy puzzles before attempting some harder ones, and it worked beautifully!

The other sections don't focus on typical tactical motifs as so many books do, but instead present the reader with a number of practical situations: 'Punish bad coordination!', 'Find the unexpected blow!', 'Play the killer positional move' etc...! At the start, I was a little sceptical of how well this would work... but it does! I think this is because the general level of the examples is well chosen: most are solvable within a short time limit while harder puzzles are clearly flagged so you can decide whether you're in the mood to attempt them or not. I also appreciated the fact that I had only come across 4 or 5 of the positions in the book before: Edouard clearly invested a lot of time in selecting the examples. There were a couple of gorgeously evil tactics in there that got me oohing with pleasure. How about this one?

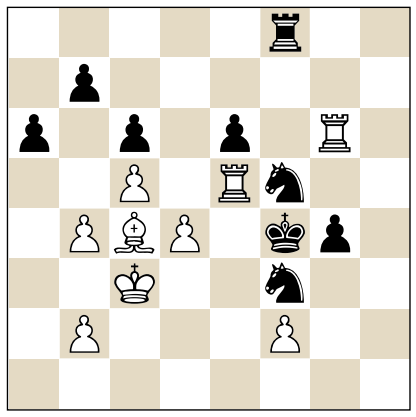


Koster-Landa
Netherlands 2006
position after 23.♗xc4

23...♕b7+ 24.♖f3 ♘xc4 25.dxc4 ♖xc3 0-1, in view of 26.♕xc3 e4



Wow!
Or this very cute mate?



Aeschbach-Patuzzo
Flims 2016
position after 44...♘f3

45.♖e4+ 1-0, as 45...♔xe4 46.♖xg4 is mate!

All in all, an enjoyable book of exercises that put me in a good mood for playing! ■

Warming up in Iceland

Anish Giri wins Reykjavik Open

He rarely plays in Opens these days, but on the eve of the Moscow GP, Anish Giri happily made an exception for the popular Reykjavik Open. After a flashy start our contributing editor seemed to stall for a moment, before he finished with three straight wins against Donchenko, Jobava and 2015 winner Erwin l'Ami to claim clear first. Here is the spectacular game with which he picked up speed again.

LENNART OOTES

As Alexander Donchenko thinks over a suggestion, Anish Giri keeps the initiative in the post-mortem.

NOTES BY
Anish Giri

Alexander Donchenko
Anish Giri
Reykjavik 2017 (8)
Catalan Opening, Closed Variation

After three frustrating draws I really had to win this one. My opponent was a young German, a solid player who always makes sure that his bishop lands on g2. Very wise.

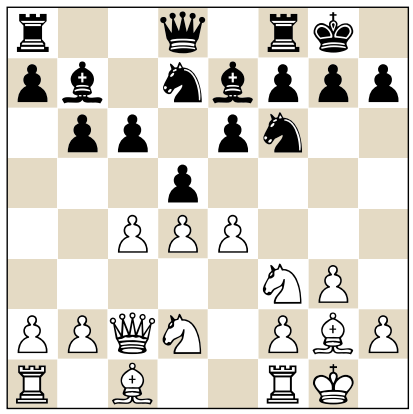
1.♘f3 d5 2.d4 e6 3.c4 c6

I don't know exactly what I was trying to achieve with my move order. One point may be that after 4.g3 dxc4!? White might never see his pawn again.

4.♕c2 ♘f6 5.♘bd2

I vaguely remembered how I had planned to equalize against this system, but during the game I didn't want to simplify the position just yet.

5...♘bd7 6.g3 ♗e7 7.♗g2 0-0 8.0-0 b6 9.e4 ♗b7



This disastrous system leads to a disastrous structure but one that my fellow-countryman Sergei Tiviakov has often used successfully. I was trying to channel my own inner Sergei Tiviakov at this point in order not to be too depressed with the opening position I had got myself into.

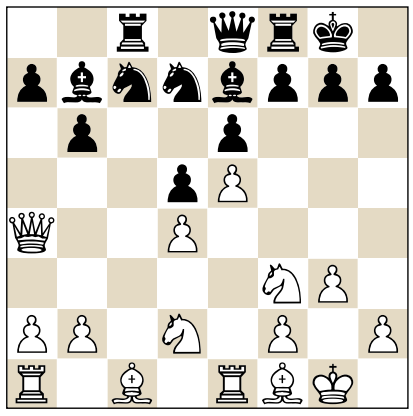
10.e5 ♘e8 11.cxd5 cxd5 12.♖e1

To make matters worse, my opponent had blitzed out all these natural moves, which didn't add to my optimism.

12...♖c8 13.♕a4 Alexander gets carried away by the idea of preventing ...♗a6. To my mind, this was already somewhat imprecise.

13...♘c7 14.♗f1 ♕e8!?

Preparing a cheapo, but more importantly, chasing away the queen from a4 in order to finally get in the desired ...♗a6.

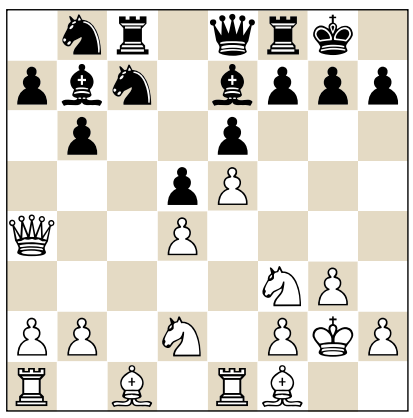


15.♔g2

This felt wrong, and the x-ray of the dead b7-bishop on the g2-king triggered my inner alarm bells. I was trying to make 15...f6 work, but it still felt a little premature. Finally, after minutes of hesitation, I decided to present my opponent with an interesting choice.

15...♘b8?

While strolling along the tables of the Reykjavik Open, pondering my chances of outplaying my opponent in this solid position, it suddenly dawned on me that the a7-pawn is not as taboo as I assumed it to be. The flashes of variations before my eyes and the cold sweat slowly receded into the background when I found a plan and some peace of mind.



16.♕xa7! ♗a8!

16...♕c6 doesn't quite trap the queen because of 17.♖e3!.

17.♕xb6 ♘c6

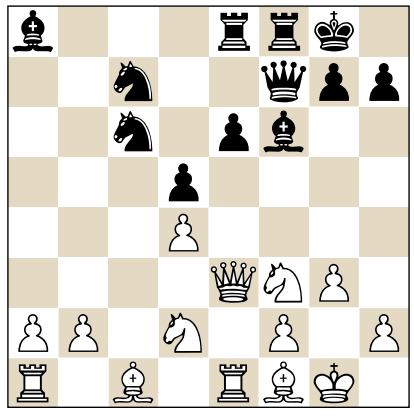
With ...f6 still on the cards, it suddenly seems that transferring the knight from d7 to c6 might actually be worth two pawns – a bit optimistic, but the idea does actually look nice, at least for now, until someone comes up with the refutation.

18.♕b3 f6! 19.♕e3 ♕f7 20.exf6 ♗xf6 21.♔g1

Alexander plays natural moves, getting the king away from the x-ray.

21...♖ce8!?

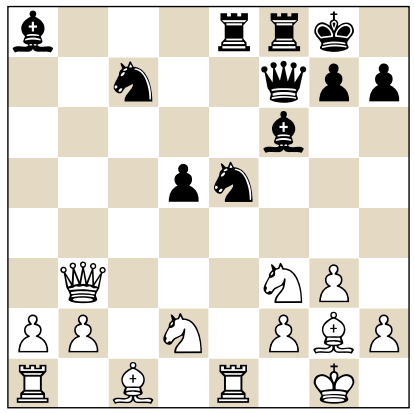
I wasn't sure how good my position was at this point, but it is always reassuring when you see all your pieces in harmony with each other and each one serving a purpose.



22.♕f4?

The turning point in the game. Now things are getting real.

22.♗g2! is a move that escaped my attention, since I assumed ...e5 was a threat. So, 22...e5 23.dxe5 ♘xe5 24.♕b3!



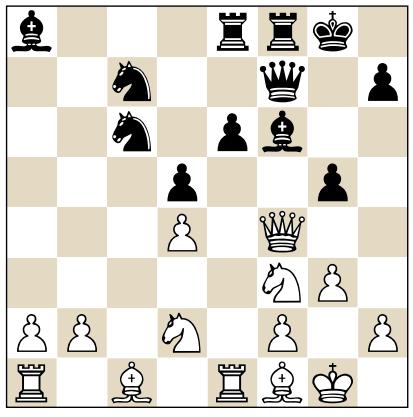
ANALYSIS DIAGRAM

and White actually has nothing to fear, and a realistic scenario here is one of Black begging for mercy after something like 24...♘e6!? 25.♘xe5 ♘d4 26.♕d3 ♗xe5 27.♘f3! ♘xf3+ 28.♕xf3 ♕a7! (28...♕xf3 29.♗xf3 ♖xf3 30.♗f4!) 29.♗f4 ♗xb2 30.♖xe8 ♖xe8 31.♖d1 ♕xa2, with a 3 v 2 endgame to appear.

What I did consider were moves with the b-pawn: 22.b3 e5 23.♗a3 e4 24.♘e5 ♘xe5 25.dxe5 ♗xe5 26.♗xf8 ♖xf8, with very pretty compensation, as well as 22.b4 e5 23.♗b2 e4 24.♘e5 ♗xe5 25.dxe5 ♘xb4, which looked nice for Black. Having said that, objectively White is also still in business in both cases.

22...g5!

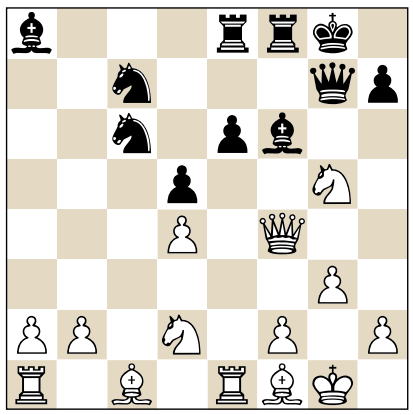
It didn't take too long to see that this was good, but executing this move was still a pleasant experience.



23.♘xg5

23.♕e3 is sad. Now Black has won two tempi and can proceed with the natural 23...e5, when White no longer has a way to keep things together.

23...♕g7



24.♘h3? Not only does this allow Black to totally overrun the white position; it is also a bad move objectively.

24.♘df3 was the only way to stay in the game, when after 24...h6!, and now the cold-blooded 25.♗e3! hxg5 26.♕g4, with three pawns for the piece, White is still in the game, although it is obvious that he has no reason to feel good about himself.

24...♘xd4 25.♗d3 e5

Now the game will play itself. Black just marches his central pawns

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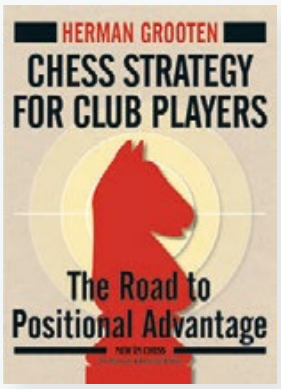

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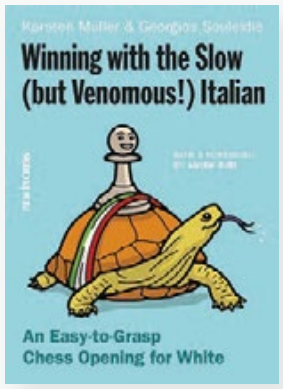

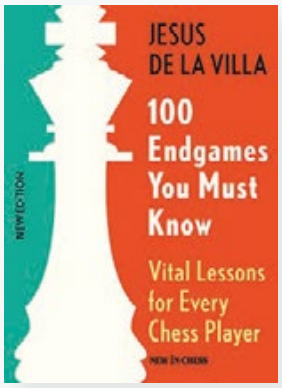

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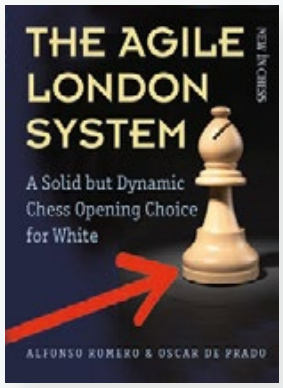

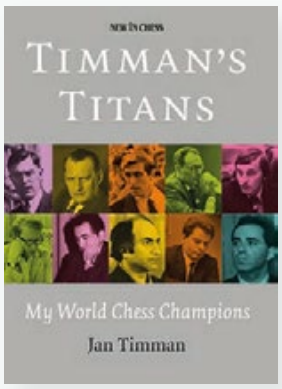

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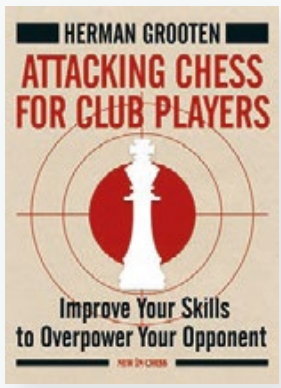

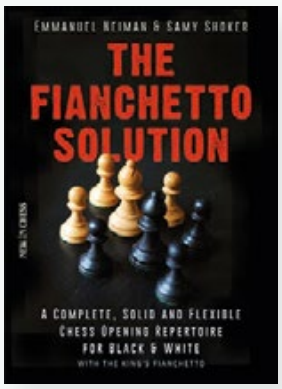
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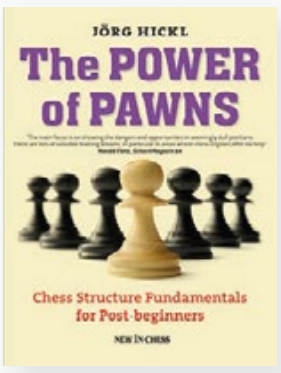

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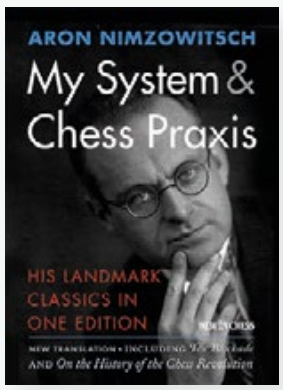

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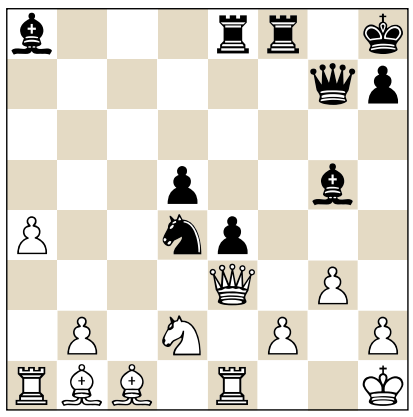
forward, backed up by the heavy artillery.

26.♕e3 e4 27.♗b1 ♘ce6 28.♔h1

At this point, I had trouble coming up with a move, because everything has already been done and my position is obviously overwhelming. In the end I managed to find one.

28...♔h8!? 29.a4 ♕g4 30.♘f4 ♘xf4 31.♕xf4 ♕g7 32.♕e3 ♗g5!?



I was still unsure if I should follow this up with something concrete or whether provoking f2-f4 would be a good idea. But it's a good move either way.

33.f4 ♗f6 33...♗xf4!? is also winning, but I didn't see the need to calculate vague variations when simple moves would suffice.

34.♖a3 ♘f5 35.♕b6 ♗d4 36.♕b5 ♗f2 37.♖f1

Reykjavik 2017

					TPR
1	Anish Giri	NED	2771	8½	2865
2	Jorden van Foreest	NED	2584	8	2699
3	Sergei Movsesian	ARM	2677	8	2729
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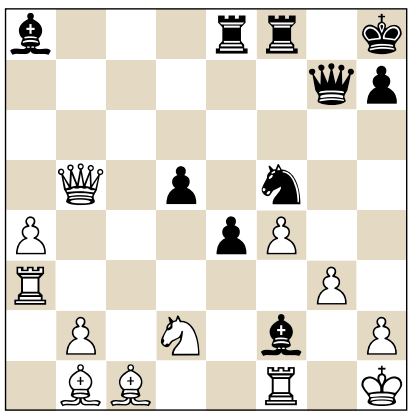
5	Gata Kamsky	USA	2668	8	2736
6	Konstantin Kavutskiy	USA	2347	7½	2505
7	Erik Blomqvist	SWE	2548	7½	2443
8	John Pigott	ENG	2381	7½	2492
9	Nils Grandelius	SWE	2641	7½	2757
10	Zoltan Almasi	HUN	2696	7½	2746
11	Emre Can	TUR	2578	7	2577
12	Eugene Perelshteyn	USA	2509	7	2512
13	Eugenio Torre	PHI	2455	7	2464
14	Erwin l'Ami	NED	2614	7	2575
15	Johann Hjartarson	ISL	2536	7	2559

266 players, 10 rounds



37...♗a7 The bishops go all the way back (again a sac on g3 looked possible). Now everything is set for the central pawns to march down the board.

38.♗a2 Or 38.♕e2 d4!. **38...d4** This allows White to block the a8-bishop, but the ♗d5-♕b5 construction is too shaky to work.

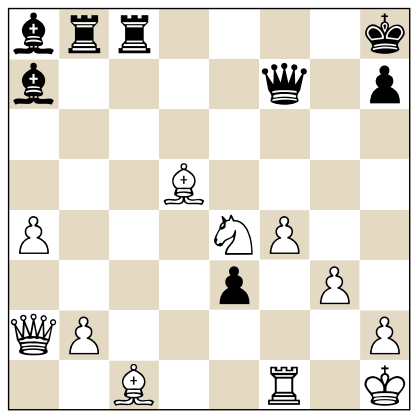
39.♗d5 ♖b8 40.♕c4

40.♕a5 loses by force: 40...♗b6 41.♕b5 ♘d6 42.♕b3 ♗c5 43.♕a2 ♗xa3 44.bxa3, and being an exchange down is not White's only problem. Black will regain control of the long diagonal after, for example, 44...♗b7!?, and sooner or later the central pawns will make it all the way down the board.

40...♖fc8

It was obvious that there should be a way to clinch the game by now, and I was hoping that my opponent would allow me the pretty finish.

41.♕a2 ♘e3 42.♖xe3 dxe3 43.♘xe4 ♕f7!



What a show-off. White resigned in view of 44.♗xf7 ♗xe4+ 45.♔g1 e2+ 46.♖f2 ♖xc1 mate. ■

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Hans Ree

Escape into Chess

Recently, the Dutch historian Jolande Withuis published a small volume about the war experiences of her late father Berry Withuis, a chess journalist and a great chess organizer. **HANS REE** realized how much he had not known about a man he had known for decades.

I knew, of course, that the term grandmaster brings a smile to the faces of people who do not play chess. The word is associated with freemasonry, the courts of fairy-tale kings or a comical character in a puppet show. But I only realized the full extent of the mirth our jargon can evoke in 1997, when I read a review of my Dutch book *Schitterend Schaak*, which was later translated as *The Human Comedy of Chess*. The reviewer was Jolande Withuis, a Dutch historian who in recent years has been best known for her biography of our late Queen Juliana. I have known her since she was a schoolgirl, since she is the daughter of chess journalist and organizer Berry Withuis (1920-2009).

In an obituary, I called Berry the Great Helmsman of Dutch chess, because for decades he had been involved in practically every important chess event in the Netherlands. Many of these events he had created himself. And just like the original Great Helmsman, Chairman Mao, he was a staunch Communist.

Jolande's review was friendly enough, but I got the feeling that I was praised for what she mistakenly considered to be my ironic distance from chess. The newspaper editors had entitled her review *Reconciliation with snobbery*. In her eyes, the chess world stood for snobbery, but because of my book she had apparently become reluctantly reconciled to it.

To me, 'opening repertoire' was a neutral term, but to her it was a rather pompous expression, reflecting the arrogance of Caissa. Amused, but also somewhat irritated, she found that chess players exchanged solemn talk about sacrifices, as if they were ancient priests, about 'esoteric' endgames or an 'unhappy love affair' with the Budapest Gambit. We have our Nimzo and Bogo, Sicilian and Tartakower, and we have an endless supply of stories and anecdotes.

Jolande wondered if chess players had been able to fool the public with all this hocus pocus, and present themselves as the fascinating denizens of an eccentric world of their own. We had created an excuse to free ourselves from ordinary duties, in the cause of a trivial pursuit more or less at the level of halma, rummikub or embroidery. She was obviously well-acquainted with our world, but only to reject it.

Well, at least Jolande liked me, and she was fond of the archetypical bohemian grandmaster Hein Donner, and surely much of her debunking of chess was done tongue-in-cheek. But there was a serious side to her drollery. During her youth, the chess world had been dominated by Soviet players to such an extent that, for her, chess had become associated with the Soviet-Union and with Communism. Behind her polemic with chess, there was a polemic with Communism in general and her father in particular.

On our way to a simul

I had known Berry Withuis well from around 1960 until the early 1990s, when he moved from Amsterdam to his birthplace, the town of Zutphen in the east of the Netherlands. After his move to Zutphen we lost contact, which is my fault. Other chess players visited him and his wife and were hospitably treated. Berry still liked to play blitz.

I thought I would meet him anyway at one of the tournaments he had been so closely involved in, but after his move to Zutphen he never visited them again.

I had played hundreds, maybe thousands of blitz games with Berry – in his home in Amsterdam or at the tournaments where he was chief of the press service, during the brief moments late at night when he was not working. He was a fanatic worker.

I had been in his car dozens of times on our way to one of the events in the simul network he had created all over the Netherlands. Of course we spoke not only about chess.

I remember that once, with Donner and me in the car, the conversation, instigated by the provocative Donner, reached the dangerous point where we were discussing the aftermath of a Communist revolution. Berry said

that, unpleasant as the prospect might be to him, half-hearted leftists like us would have to be executed by his comrades.

Was that only ironic banter, not to be taken seriously? I am not completely sure. He was no fool and knew from history that a Communist take-over, which he would welcome, could not be bloodless. On the other hand, privately he was a man who wouldn't hurt a fly.

But how well do you know someone you know only through chess? I remember Hein Donner saying that chess was our way to meet people without really communicating with them.

The panic of a former Calvinist

I knew a lot about Berry. I knew that he was a man of strong opinions who relied on iron laws in chess, politics and life. I knew that it was difficult to drag him into conversations in which the opinions expressed were more fluid and malleable. He had his gods: Marx, Lenin and great chess players, and their words were Holy Writ. Despite all his sociability, his stream of chess anecdotes, his jokes and his irony, he kept his distance. He used the expression 'the genius Withuis', and of course this was ironic, but it was also a way to protect himself, since the word 'I' would have been too personal and would commit him too much.

All this I had known by observing Berry in the chess world, but it was only through the writings of his daughter Jolande that I realized the agony behind his apparent invulnerability.

After her father's death she sent me the text of the speech she had given at his cremation, which had been a sober ceremony, although less sober than Berry himself would have wished. I was greatly moved by what she modestly called her little chat.

At some point she had said: 'To say that he was allergic to organ music would be a euphemism. The sound of an organ roused him to a state of anger and panic.' As a child in Zutphen, he had been raised under a strict Calvinist regime that in later life he vehemently rejected and replaced with another orthodoxy, that of Communism.

'Berry said that, unpleasant as the prospect might be to him, half-hearted leftists like us would have to be executed by his comrades.'

But he proved unable to embrace the Party discipline full-heartedly, and in the 1950s gave up his job at the Communist newspaper *De Waarheid* (Truth) to start working as a free-lance chess journalist, never to take up a regular job again.

He had been a loving father, but not an attentive one. Before becoming a bit deaf, he had been selectively deaf for decades, said Jolande at the ceremony, meaning that he had been deaf to any request to fulfil the fatherly duties of everyday life.

He never took walks with her, she said, nor cycled, skated, drew, visited a museum or listened to music with her. Yes, once Berry and Jolande had made a beautiful walk on the frozen Amsterdam canals, but of course it led straight to the chess club. Once he had taken her, six years old at the time, to a meeting in some hotel. When he came home, his wife was dismayed to find that he had forgotten about his daughter and left her there.

Tormented by the war

It was the war, the German occupation of the Netherlands in World War II, that had made him what he was. On the mourning card that his family sent out after his death, it said that he died 'still cursing the Fascists, but otherwise in good spirits and full of words and wit like always.'

Recently, Jolande Withuis published a slim volume *De oorlog van mijn vader* (My father's war). Her father had always been reluctant to speak about his experiences during the war, but she had used the bits and pieces he had let slip to patch together a brief and tentative reconstruction.

In 1942 or 1943, Berry had been on his way to Germany as a forced labourer, but with an assignment from the Dutch Communist Party to contact the German Resistance. In Germany he managed to escape from the train. He fulfilled his assignment, lived like a vagrant and experienced the heavy allied bombings of the Ruhr area, one of the industrial hearts of Germany. After the German capitulation he worked for an allied intelligence service to track down war criminals. It was only in September 1945 that an English intelligence officer brought him back to the Netherlands on a British passport. His health had been damaged, and according to Jolande, he had become a different man, tormented and rigid in his views.

Before the war he had been a lover of poetry and what he would later come to consider 'bourgeois literature'.

In the archives of the local newspaper, where Berry had been working before the war, Jolande found articles from him about historical novels and 19th-century poetry in which she found it impossible to recognize the father she had known; the father who had called novels and poetry 'superfluous'.

He was tormented by nightmares for many years, and during the last few days before his death, in 2009, he raved mostly in German. '*Kaputt*, *kaputt*.'

I had known Berry for decades, but I realized that I had not known him very well. As the actor Robin Williams famously said: 'Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Be kind. Always.' ■

Just Checking

Harika Dronavalli

CURRENT ELO: 2531

DATE OF BIRTH: January 12, 1991

PLACE OF BIRTH: Guntur, India

PLACE OF RESIDENCE: Hyderabad, India

What is your favourite city?
The city I live in – Hyderabad.

What was the last great meal you had?
Spicy Indian food with my family.

What drink brings a smile to your face?
Hot chocolate. ☺

Which book would you give to a dear friend?
The Secret by Rhonda Byrne.

What book is currently on your bedside table?
The Chimp Paradox by Prof Steve Peters.

What is your all-time favourite movie?
Chak De!, an Indian movie (2007).

And your favourite TV series?
Monk.

Do you have a favourite actor?
Ranbir Kapoor.

And a favourite actress?
Deepika Padukone.

What music are you currently listening to?
Some Indian music.

Is there a painting/work of art that moves you?
Nope.

Who is your favourite chess player of all time?
Judit Polgar, because she broke the barrier between men and women's chess.

Is there a chess book that had a profound influence on you?
Tragicomedy in the Endgame by Mark Dvoretsky.

What was your best result ever?
Bronze medals in the World Championships of 2012, 2015 and 2017.

And the best game you played?
My game against Nigel Short, Gibraltar 2016, that won the best game prize.

What is your favourite square?
Never really thought about it. Maybe c4.

Do chess players have typical shortcomings?
I think it varies from person to person.

What are chess players particularly good at (except for chess)?
As far as I can see, chess players are good at making friends worldwide.

Do you have any superstitions concerning chess?
Since childhood, I have been adjusting my pieces in the same pattern. First the pieces on the right side, then the pieces on the left side and the king and queen. Next the pawns on the right and left side.

Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, or?
Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Who do you follow on Twitter?
Sports personalities, actors, friends and acquaintances.

What is your life motto?
If you can dream it, you can achieve it.

When was the last time you cried?
When I lost in the semi-finals of this year's World Championship.

When were you happiest?
Most of the time. ☺

Who or what would you like to be if you weren't yourself?
I can't imagine being anyone else than myself. ☺

Which three people would you like to invite to dinner?
Tom Cruise, Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic.

What is the best piece of advice you were ever given?
Stay calm, it's just a game.

Is there something you'd love to learn?
More languages.

What is your greatest regret?
No regrets, only lessons learned.

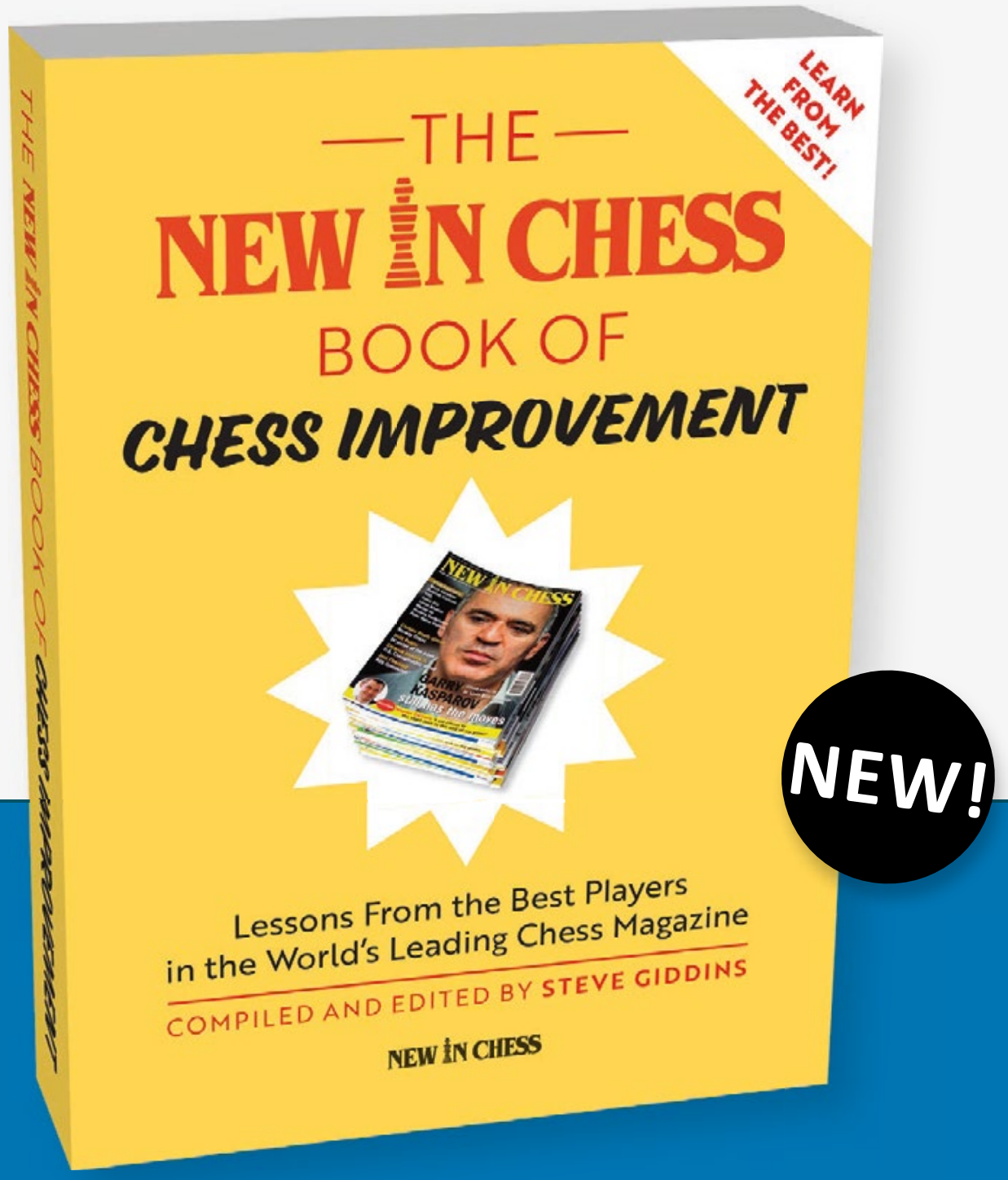
How do you relax?
By listening to music, watching movies, TV shows, cooking and long walks.

If you could change one thing in the chess world, what would it be?
I would remove engines. It is much more fun to analyse and see chess from a human point of view, without the help of engines.

Is a knowledge of chess useful in everyday life?
I don't know. I never noticed it being useful.

What is the best thing that was ever said about chess?
'I am convinced, the way one plays chess always reflects the player's personality.' – Vladimir Kramnik

Learn from the best!



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